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The Exegesis of Tabatabaei and the Hermeneutics of Hirsch: A Comparative Study

By:

Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2007

**University of Durham
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18 APR 2008

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Declaration

I, the author of this thesis, declare that none of the materials in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree qualification in this or any other university.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have been my guiding light throughout my life and to my wife and children who have always given me their unconditional support, especially during the years that it took me to finish this work.

Acknowledgements

Any research work by its very nature is a team work and this one is no exception. The people who helped me in the evolution and completion of this thesis are too numerous to name here. I sincerely hope that any omissions are forgiven for I remain truly indebted to them.

My special thanks and gratitude are due to my supervisor Dr Colin Turner who guided me through every stage of my work patiently and meticulously until the very end. He was always available when needed and went out of his way to ensure that the research was carried out in a proper and thorough fashion.

Thanks also are due to all members of staff at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University. A special thank you is also extended to the staff at the university library for their continuous help throughout the period of my research.

Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to each member of my family who stoically endured the challenges and difficulties associated with living away from home for many years and coping with fortitude and without complaint with my working late and at unsociable hours.

Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study between Hermeneutics on the one hand and exegesis of the Holy Qur'an on the other. Its objective is to discover whether there are salient points of convergence between the two disciplines, and whether issues germane to the Hermeneutical tradition in the West have been referred to and/or employed in Muslim works of Qur'an commentary. To this end, the works of one of the most prominent Shi'ite philosophers and exegetes, Allama Mohammad Hossein Tabataei, have been analysed and compared with the perspective and methodology of E.D. Hirsch, one of the most important hermeneuticians in the Western World.

Hirsch has been chosen since, in the opinion of the author, there is a considerable number of commonalities between the Hirschian approach to hermeneutics and the exegetical methodology of Tabatabaei and other Shi'ite Muslim interpreters of the Qur'an.. Hirsch, as an objectivist, along with a number of other Hermeneutical scholars, are critical of those who subscribe to philosophical Hermeneutics, such as Heidegger and Gadamer. The same approach is taken in Tabatabaei's works, thus providing a strong rationale for an academic comparison of these two scholars.

For this reason, this thesis attempts to study the theories of Tabatabaei and Hirsch in order to highlight the similarities and differences in their works. The central hypothesis is that while small differences in approach exist, there is much common ground, and that it is possible to use certain facets of Hirschian hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an, thus modernising some of the existing exegetical approaches employed by Shi'ite scholars.

Since the aim of this thesis is to compare the interpretive works of Tabatabaei with those of Hirsch's, an introductory chapter has been dedicated to the study of the evolution of Shi'ite exegesis from the beginning to date. Tabatabaei's *Al-Mizan* has been chosen as the foremost work of Shi'ite exegesis in the modern period. Furthermore, a complete chapter has also been dedicated to Tabatabaei's exegetical *modus operandi* as reflected in *Al-Mizan*, in order to arrive at a better understanding of his perspectives.

This research arrives at the conclusion that philosophical Hermeneutics and Epistemology have opened new horizons on which we will always be dependent. Whatever interpretive theories with regards to the understanding of the text are accepted, or whatever the tendency as far as literary criticism is concerned, or whatever ideas are accepted in the arena of philosophy of human and social sciences, the discussion of the nature of understanding in general cannot be avoided. This does not mean that Hermeneutics is limited to these new theories. Rather, the opportunity always exists to introduce new interpretive theories in connection with the understanding of the text. It is indeed possible to study these discussions in detail in a separate sphere independent of the other branches of Islamic sciences and arrive at a number of stable principles in the interpretation of the text in Islamic research.

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Introduction

The word *Hermeneutics* derives from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* meaning “to interpret”. The noun *hermeneia* means “interpretation”. In fact *hermeneuein* as well as *hermeneia* as Greek verb and noun were used in various forms in ancient texts. Aristotle called his own treatise *Pari Hermeneias* which can be translated as “On Interpretation”. This word was used in works by Plato several times as well as works by most of the ancient writers.¹ The common root of the above words is Hermes, the Messenger-god of the Greeks.

The discovery of language and writing i.e. two means which humans use to perceive meaning and to convey it to others, is attributed to the Greeks. The task of Hermes was to make clear some of the ambiguous words. Obviously, here “the language” has a basic role in this respect.² Hermeneutics has been defined in modern times in different ways. From a historical point of view this word came into modern times when people needed to have books which set down the rules and principles for correct exegesis of the Scriptures.

Apparently the first time a book was published about hermeneutics was in 1654 by J. C.Dannhauer entitled : *Hermeneutica sacra sive methodus expoendarum sacrarum litterarum*,. From the title of the book one can infer that hermeneutics is considered as the methodology of interpretation.³ As mentioned in the dictionary “The American Heritage” hermeneutics is regarded as the science or method of interpretation, particularly interpretation of the Bible.⁴

After the publication of Dannhauer’s book, the term Hermeneutics was used frequently, specially in Germany.⁵ The meaning of hermeneutics was expanded later and found its way to non-theological areas. This term was also employed when interpreters strove to utilise particular methods with regard to vague texts in order to uncover their hidden meanings. It should be mentioned that the appearance of the term “hermeneutics” goes back to the seventeenth century but the operation of exegesis of the text and presentation of interpretive theories point back to antiquity.⁶



Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics as a “science” or “art” of understanding.⁷ He did not consider hermeneutics as merely a set of rules which help humans achieve a better understanding of the text. In fact, he has made hermeneutics into a comprehensive integrated system in order to reach general hermeneutics.

With the general hermeneutics of Schleiermacher a new era commences in interpretive discussion. Hermeneutics was no longer considered as only a collection of rules and laws, but rather a study in the essence of understanding. In fact, this attitude paves the way to the emergence of the theory of philosophical hermeneutics. One can say that new hermeneutics appears historically from biblical exegesis and classical philology.

Another definition of hermeneutics is attributed to Wilhelm Dilthey. He regards hermeneutics as the foundation for all human sciences. The basic aim of his hermeneutical attempt is to enhance the authority and value of human sciences as well as giving them the same rank as experimental sciences.⁸

He believed human sciences required another “critique” of reason concerning historical understanding in the same way that Kant had done with regard to critique of pure reason for the natural sciences.⁹

Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer define hermeneutics as the

“Phenomenology of Dasein”. Their reason is that the Greek verb *hermeneuin* means “to make something understandable” and since the Phenomenology of Dasein makes “being” understandable, then attempting to analyze the structure of the existence of Dasein and its phenomenology is regarded as a Hermeneutical operation.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Heidegger and his follower Gadamer, by introducing such a definition shifted their attention from epistemology to ontology.¹¹ Likewise they departed from their predecessors’ theory of methodology in favour of the philosophical essence of understanding.¹² In this way, according to this definition, hermeneutics will no longer be a collection of rules for interpreting the text. That is why this theory (i.e. philosophical hermeneutics) cannot be comparable to the interpretive theory of Muslim scholars, all of whom emphasise methodology (as will be discussed later).

Paul Ricoeur is among those who regard hermeneutics as a system of interpretation which deals with the text. However, he expanded the meaning of the text to mean that even what happens in dreams needs to be interpreted. He connected hermeneutics to psychology and saw it as a technique of explaining symbols.¹³ As he asserts in the definition of Hermeneutics : “We mean by hermeneutics the theory of rules that govern an exegesis, that is to say, an interpretation of a particular text or collection of signs susceptible of being considered as a text.”¹⁴

What has been mentioned so far was only part of the bulk of definitions of hermeneutics. This suffices to prove the fact that the volume of discussions on hermeneutics is enormous and there are a huge number of different views on this subject.¹⁵ This indicates very clearly that it is practically impossible to present a comprehensive definition to cover all hermeneutical viewpoints. There exist different perspectives on hermeneutics’ aims and functions which are contradictory and incompatible. For instance, Wilhelm Dilthey regards hermeneutics as a type of methodology and epistemology at the service of human sciences. On the other hand, philosophical hermeneutics, which begins with Heidegger, does not consider hermeneutics as a methodology, rather a philosophical thinking in the foundations of the ontology of understanding.

Therefore, it is not possible to introduce a full and single definition at the same time represent all of the theoretical and intellectual attempts. Of course, there is a possibility of defining hermeneutics in general terms in order to clear man’s mind ready to enter the domain for a discussion of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics in Islamic texts

The word Hermeneutics, like other new subjects such as Analytic Philosophy, Linguistics , Philosophy of Language and Symptomatology, has no place in different spheres of Islamic knowledge. Muslim scholars, including philosophers, jurists and exegetes have not dealt with Hermeneutics as a separate subject.

Hermeneutics before Heidegger pays strong attention to the interpretation of the text and often seeks theorization with regard to the quality of exegesis and providing the best method for the proper understanding of the text. Since Islamic sciences, especially Jurisprudence, Theology and Exegesis, discuss *Understanding* as well as

interpretation of the text on a large scale, Muslim scholars follow a particular interpretive theory in order to study religious texts. In fact, most of the studies in connection with exegesis are similar to Hermeneutical theories (although they have not called them Hermeneutics).

Interpretive discussions need to be carried out in three particular branches of Islamic sciences i.e. Theology, Jurisprudence and Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an, but such discussions traditionally are studied in the "Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence" and "An Introduction to Exegesis". The most important aspect of the Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence is to expurgate a group of rules which can be used to infer divine perception from the Islamic sources. The interpreters of the Qur'an discussed in a dispersed way the rules for interpreting and understanding the Qur'anic verses in the introductions to their exegesis of the Qur'an. These are the only discussions that can be considered as Hermeneutical in nature. For instance, Allameh Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai in the preface to *Al-Mizan* (an exegesis of the Qur'an) proposed a particular method in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. His theory, which has been discussed in the first chapter in detail, is in contrast to those who insist that the real interpretation of the Qur'an is possible only when we refer to the traditions of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams and they do not allow anybody to interpret the Qur'anic verses with the help of reason or the Qur'an itself.

Such theorizations seem to be the sort of Hermeneutical discussions which are the foundations of a variety of Qur'anic interpretive methods. The tendency of some Gnostics as well as the followers of the Sufi sects to the secret interpretation of the Qur'an and their persistence in mysterious exegesis is a kind of Hermeneutical attitude which takes precedence amongst certain Christian researchers. The allegorical interpretation is based on the presupposition that the language of the text is somewhat removed from the natural and common language. For this reason one should find a way to the real meanings which are hidden behind the allusive words. The apparent meanings hinder rather than help as far as the real meanings are concerned.

Despite the opposition of some Islamic scholars in Iran, especially in the Islamic Seminary of Qom, with regard to the application of Hermeneutical perspectives on Islamic texts, there is a large group of other Islamic scholars, including Philosophers

and Jurisprudents, who accept it, provided that the aim of the interpretation of the text is to achieve the intention of the author. The interpreter plays the best role in explaining and understanding the text as long as he implements the interpretive rules and principles. In Islamic Hermeneutics one should attempt to discover the intention as well as the message of the author in religious texts in order to modify various perspectives in connection with Hermeneutics. This should then serve as an acceptable basis in interpreting the Holy Qur'an for all exegetes.¹⁶

Allameh Tabatabai is among the latter group of Islamic scholars. Many Hermeneutical points can be found in his interpretive works particularly *Al-Mizan* (The most prominent exegesis of the Holy Qur'an in Shi'ism). However, he insists on the author's intention and emphasises that the purpose of interpretation is to discover this intention. The interpreter is faced with the task of reflecting the author's viewpoints and he must struggle to understand what the author intended to express in the text. An interpreter has no right to impose his own ideas on the text or produce a meaning other than what the author had in mind. In this way, Tabatabai's point of view is not compatible with those who believe that the aim of the interpretation of the text is not related to the intention of the author. Instead, the interpreter is allowed to interpret the text in the way he understands.

Therefore, Tabatabai's interpretive perspectives conformed to Hermeneutics prior to Philosophical Hermeneutics, i.e. Classic and Romantic Hermeneutics, which emphasise the intention of the author. That is why Eric D. Hirsch's works have been chosen by this author for a comparative study with Tabatabai's works, since Hirsch is inclined towards Romantic Hermeneutics and in favour of its interpretive principles. In spite of some differences between Hirsch and Tabatabai, there are many common viewpoints which need to be scrutinised carefully. Obviously, the outcome of this study will be useful to analyze the methods of understanding in Islamic texts and to modernize certain interpretive styles.

It should be mentioned that one of the most important points emphasised by both Tabatabai and Hirsch is about "objectivism" in interpretation of the text. At this juncture it is worth clarifying the problem of Objectivism and Subjectivism in order to highlight the key points in both Hermeneutical perspectives of Tabatabai and

Hirsch on the one hand as well as the ideas of the adherents of Philosophical Hermeneutics like Heidegger and Gadamer on the other:

Objective and Relative Hermeneutics

Hermeneutic scholars who appeared before Heidegger, despite some differences, had an objective attitude towards interpretation and used to defend the possibility of objective understanding of interpretation and distinguished valid and invalid interpretation from each other. Basically the foundation of their work has been the compilation of methods and rules for identifying valid and invalid interpretations.

But Heidegger in his fundamental hermeneutics that is about the ontology of understanding opened the gate of hermeneutic relativism. Gadamer too in his analysis of the existence of understanding and its conditions resists subjectivism but practically he reaches relativism. Ricoeur too attempts to found his hermeneutic curve on objectivism and the methodical clarification of the structure of the text but his interpretative theory is expressive of a kind of relativism.

In the twentieth century a move towards relativism became prevalent in hermeneutics, although objective inclinations continued to exist. Emilio Betti and Eric D. Hirsch could be regarded as the outstanding figures in the objective attitude that associate a kind of return to the historical tradition of hermeneutics and a rise against the relative attitude of philosophical hermeneutics. Here, before we examine and explain the hermeneutic ideas of Hirsch as an outstanding thinker of objectivism, it seems appropriate to give a brief explanation about relativism and objectivism and the distinction between the two issues.

1. Relativism

Relativism is a viewpoint that has established its presence in the various branches of science. As there are relativistic schools in hermeneutics there are similar schools in the philosophy of ethics and epistemology.

Those who say that truth is relative recognize it as changeable. Maybe a matter is regarded as truth by some and not truth by others. An issue might be true and real for one person but false and lacking in truth for others. It is even possible that at a

certain time something is true but at other times is not. Believers in relativism of truth do not recognize an objective criterion that is independent from persons and changing conditions and occasions for its measurement. Thus they do not believe in the absolute truth and freedom from the relationship with persons and particular conditions and time.

Ethical relativism also discards absolute ethical issues, which are always valid. Different relativistic schools in the field of ethics share a common idea on this matter: that a description of actions as being good and bad and ethical do(s) and don't(s) are not completely free from all bonds or relationships, but admitting each of these issues depends on the particular occasion, mentality of the individual world or the influence of socio-economic conditions.

Relativism defends pluralism in all arenas. The common aspect of relativism in all the different branches is that there is no principle, paradigm or criterion which can put an end to this plurality and judgement among various attitudes and viewpoints and make a distinction between the valid and the invalid. Relativism is not on good terms with words like "truthfulness," "truth," "valid" and "null". What is important to the relativistic is difference and plurality. He tries to determine the source of difference and plurality of understandings and interpretations without worrying about a distinction between the just and the unjust or the valid and invalid, since the presupposition for introducing such issues is that the objective criteria which are independent from the elements of relativism of understanding should exist, while the relativistic discards such criteria.

Relativism in the arena of hermeneutics has the same characteristic. The relativistic hermeneutic attitudes reject the possibility of a valid, fixed and non-historical understanding because he believes that one could offer various interpretations for each work. This plurality of interpretation is natural and justified and one cannot judge among these interpretations and distinguish the valid from the invalid. Those thinkers of relativistic hermeneutics who relate understanding to the semantic horizon of the interpreter and his hermeneutic position believe in the historicity of understanding and regards impossible the non-historical understanding and being independent of the interpreter.

Relativism or objectivism is in contrast but the former could not be set in contrast to subjectivism, since subjectivism might lead to objectivism or subjectivism might be of the nature of relativism. Therefore, subjectivism has no logical companionship with relativism. For instance, one could mention the phenomenism of Edmond Husserl, while subjectivism has no elements of relativism.

Relativism has different sources. Some elements of relativism have a subjective aspect while others have a non-subjective aspect. The Marxist view on ethics could be offered here as an instance. Marxism recognizes ethical issues as relative and searches for the source of this relativism in the form of production and the type of economic life of communities. From a Marxist perspective the production system of every nation necessitates a particular ethical content. With a change of form of economic production, the ethical attitude also changes. This relativism has no subjective source and connects ethics to an objective and external matter known as the system and means of production.

The relativism in philosophical hermeneutics has a subjective source since it identifies the interpretation of works and the hermeneutic understanding and any change as influenced by a change of the semantic horizon and the hermeneutic position of the interpreter. This relativism is not of the absolute subjective type because it does not give the control of understanding and interpretation completely to the interpreter's mentality. However, since it recognizes the interpreter's contribution to the semantic horizon in the understanding process, and understanding as always the fusion of the semantic horizon of the interpreter and the text, it believes in the relativism of understanding. Therefore, relativism is not a companion for subjectivism though they both come together sometimes, like the relativism which exists in philosophical hermeneutics.

2. Objectivism

Objectivism is contrasted with relativism and all its forms are tinged by principle. In other words, wherever objectivism is introduced a group of principles, pillars and foundations are presupposed. For instance, aesthetic objectivism is based on the premise that the root of beauty comes from a reality beyond the taste and mentality of persons. This reality could be realized, distinguished and felt by people. In ethics

too, philosophers of ethics in objectivism for the foundational ethical issues, apart from individual interests and inclinations, hold that there is no other way but to surrender and admit their truthfulness before perceiving their objective source.

The other characteristic of objectivism is to give allowance to fixity. Relativism is mixed with change and plurality and is not compatible with fixed, valid and truthful issues. However, the objectivistic aspects in every field of knowledge do not regard the realization of such issues as inaccessible.¹⁷

The other characteristic of objectivism is that it insists on the distinction between the subject and the object. The object, whether with ethical or value content, semantic content of the text or the aesthetic content of the work, is regarded as independent of the subject. The responsibility of the subject is to achieve its proper understanding, and not to allow our mentality, desire and inclination to interfere with the content of the object.

As Bernesttein writes:

In modern times objectivism has been closely linked with an acceptance of a basic metaphysical or epistemological distinction between the subject and the object. What is "out there" (objective) is presumed to be independent of us (subjects) and knowledge is achieved when a subject correctly mirrors or represents objective reality.¹⁸

Objectivistic hermeneutics insists on the possibility of an objective and fixed understanding which is beyond history. According to this type of hermeneutics, the meaning of the text is a reality independent of the interpreter which is rooted in the author's intention. The interpreter can reach this objective and factual meaning. The meaning of the text is neither tied to the mentality and semantic horizon of the interpreter nor has it any relationship with the prevailing conditions of his age. As a geometrician calculates the volume of a cube as a reality independent of his intellectual ability and inclinations, the interpreter too understands and interprets the meaning of the text as a reality independent of himself. If the interpreter achieves the author's intention in the process of interpretation he or she will have a fixed matter which will always be applicable. In the example too the perceiving of the volume of the cube is a fixed and unchangeable issue beyond history. Relativistic hermeneutics

believes in historicity and its changeability due to the relationship between the content of understanding and changing matters.

Tabatabai like Hirsch strongly defends objective Hermeneutics for there are many cases in his interpretive and philosophical works which very clearly indicate that he agrees with objectivism. Thus there are many similarities between Tabatabai and Hirsch based on objectivism which can be compared with each other.

It is worth mentioning that Islamic Interpretive discussions do not form a separate discipline amongst Muslims and philosophical and mystical scholars have not considered these as separate entities.

All the topics within Western Hermeneutics have been discussed in Islamic works as part of other subjects. Examples are the Science of the Principle of Jurisprudence, Introductions to the Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, etc. This also applies to arts and aesthetics. In this area too all the discussions under the Philosophy of Arts or Aesthetics in the West have been included as part of philosophical works in the World of Islam and not separate disciplines.

Therefore, due to the critical intellectual development that has taken place in the West, Hermeneutics was separated from theology and gnosticism and became an independent discipline. Hermeneutics needed separate theories in order to form a new foundation for it. This did not happen in the Muslim World. It is worth noting that in both disciplines in the Western World, namely Aesthetics and Hermeneutics, philosophers became involved and propounded new theories leading to numerous works. For example, instead of considering the principles of interpretation or laying the foundations for methodology for human sciences they turned to the essence of understanding and its relationship to the reality of existence. In other words, they turned from methodology to epistemology and anthology.

By contrast, this separation never happened in the World of Islam, and, therefore, a separate discipline was not formed to include discussions like the nature of interpretation and its principles. Consequently, comparing Hermeneutics with its Islamic equivalent is limited to the principles of exegesis of the Holy Qur'an.

However, if we extend the domain of the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, it is possible to compare it with Hermeneutics in all its different aspects in detail. For example, discussions such as understanding and its nature and its relationship with existence *etc.* must be compared and contrasted with Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics has many various forms the oldest of which is the Theory of Biblical Exegesis which comprises many principles whose application will help the interpreter to reach the meaning of the text. This form of Hermeneutics must be compared with the principles of interpretation and its methods amongst Muslim scholars. However, if we consider Hermeneutics as general philosophical methodology, then comparing it with Islamic works takes on a different complexion. Therefore, in this form of Hermeneutics, interpreters following Rationalism and the concepts of Enlightenment have generalised the interpretive methods of the Scriptures and its principles to include other books.

Interpreters adhering to this method were trying to interpret the scriptures solely on the basis of natural reason, with which everyone is endowed. In this method, interpreters were seeking the spirit behind every work in order to express it in contemporary language. Thereafter, Hermeneutics, which was confined to the exegesis of the Scriptures, conforming to the requirements of Enlightenment, gradually turned into a science of interpretation whose meaning and general principles were based on Philology. Therefore, Bible was treated like any other book as far as interpretation was concerned. With the dominance of Rationalism and the general conditions prevailing in the age of Enlightenment, interpretation was applied to non religious as well as religious disciplines. This lead to the advent of the theories of Schleiermacher and Diltay who considered Hermeneutics as the "science" or "art" of understanding. In other words, they regarded Hermeneutics as the methodological foundation of human science. This lead to the emergence of a different form of Hermeneutics.

Therefore, this method of interpretation has been called Philology because it encompasses all forms of the written and spoken word. This form of Hermeneutics whose principles are based on language, whether religious or non-religious text, does not have an equivalent in the World of Islam. That is to say, in Islamic sciences there is not a discipline solely dedicated to interpretation. What little that does exist is

related to the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an. These are normally included in introductions to the interpretive works on the Holy Qur'an. As far as Islamic scholars are concerned, interpretation is considered as "science" and not "art". As such, a separate discipline must be introduced in Islamic sciences and its principles of understanding established.

In short, the study of Hermeneutical ideas of the two aforesaid scholars can pave the way to opening a new chapter in the understanding and interpretation of a text, especially religious ones. Moreover, their criticism of Heidegger's and Gadamer's theories in Hermeneutics can lead to a better understanding of the challenges which might emerge about this subject. Amongst the new theological topics under discussion in Iran, the most important is "Pluralism of Religion" which originates from Hermeneutics. Expressing any opinion concerning Pluralism depends on one's viewpoint with regard to Hermeneutics. According to many contemporary Muslim Philosophers including Tabatabai, there have been very interesting discussions in connection with Pluralism of Religion. This is comparable to Hirsch's Hermeneutical attitude but in contrast with Heidegger and Gadamer, as we will shortly see.

The subject of this thesis is entirely new; there has been no earlier research on the topic. This effort lays the foundation for further study and research to be carried out and is particularly relevant for the studies undertaken in Islamic research centres, especially in the Islamic Seminary of Qom in Iran in the fields of "The Principles of Jurisprudence" and interpretation of religious texts. Using Hermeneutics as a basis, a whole new discipline can be founded for textual exegesis.

Overview

In Chapter 1 some of the outstanding points concerning the subject and definition of *Tafseer* (Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an) according to Islamic sources are discussed; a short history of *Tafseer* in Islam as well as the development of Shiite exegesis since its emergence together with its ups and downs throughout history. Interpretive conditions and situations of Shi'ism have been examined on a century by century basis until the present day, C15th A.H., the pinnacle of Shiite exegesis. , Tabatabai's interpretive work *Al-Mizan* plays a pivotal role in the development of Shiite exegesis in the present era. The purpose of this chapter is to present a general view on

circumstances of Shiite exegesis since its genesis to date and the importance of the interpretive perspectives of Tabatabaei among Shiite exegetes.

Chapter 2 examines the two concepts of “Verbal meaning” and “Significance”, regarded as the backbone of Hermeneutical perspectives of Hirsch for without the knowledge of these terms it is impossible to understand his Hermeneutical ideas as well as his criticism of philosophical hermeneutics as represented by Gadamer in particular. One of Hirsch’s most important initiatives is to distinguish between “Understanding”, “Interpretation”, “Criticism” and “Judgement”. These have been studied in detail.

Chapter 3 analyses Hirsch’s theory with regard to “Validity in interpretation”. An attempt has been made to shed light on various aspects of his hermeneutical opinions. This paves the way to a clear understanding of the different points between those who follow “Subjectivism” and others who follow “Objectivism”. The principles and criteria of validity in interpretation as well as the possibility of preference of one interpretation over others are also dealt with. Hirsch’s criticism of Gadamer has been discussed in Chapter 4. Since Hirsch allocated the second appendix of his book (*Validity in interpretation*) to explaining and criticizing Gadamer’s hermeneutical perspectives, this thesis also opens a separate chapter in order to study in more detail Hirsch’s ideas as an objectivist in order to prepare the ground for a comparative study of Tabatabai’s interpretive works. “Pluralism”, “the problem of partnership in meaning”, “Monosemantic” and “Polysemantic” are also discussed.

Chapter 5 expresses the most important features of *Al-Mizan* in which the most interpretive ideas of Tabatabai are reflected. Introducing *Al-Mizan* in terms of content and style of discussion and Tabatabai’s unique method in exegesis of the Holy Qur’an provide us with the basis with which to compare Hirsch’s works. Amongst the problems raised in this chapter, the definitions of “*Tafseer*” and “*Ta’vil*” as well as their functions in exegesis have been given more prominence.

In Chapter 6 Tabatabai’s perspective on “Understanding and Exegesis” has been analyzed. One of the most controversial discussions amongst Muslim exegetes is the possibility or impossibility of understanding the verses of the Qur’an. Tabatabai’s

ideas on this subject and other problems like “Internal and external meaning” of Qur’anic verses, similarities or dissimilarities between “Understanding and Interpretation” and also “Types of understanding” all together have been compared to Hirsch’s opinions on “Understanding and descriptive skill”.

Tabatabai and Hirsch’s ideas on the aims of interpretation are very similar so Chapter 7 deals in detail with different points. Since Hirsch’s criticisms on the Hermeneutical ideas of Gadamer were mentioned in a separate chapter, most of which are similar to Tabatabai’s interpretive perspective, it was decided to discuss the subject separately and comprehensively in Chapter 8 in order to explore all aspects of the subject and what may be related to the idea.

¹. Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p. 12.

² Ibid and *Rutledge Encyclopedia of philosophy*, Ed by Edward Craig, Vol 4, 1998, p.385.

³ Ibid, p. 34.

⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1985, p. 607

⁵ Dann Hauer believed that the “entrance-hall” of all the sciences is the “method of interpretation” and each and every one of the branches of science are contained within the science of interpretation. The secret is that the dominant mentality of those times believed that all branches of knowledge, like Law, Theology and Medicine must be rooted in interpretation of the text, then there must exist a science that helps to identify and explain the relevant knowledge from it. (Grondin.Jean, *Introduction to philosophical hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, 1904, p.48)

⁶ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, pp.34- 35.

⁷ Ibid, p.40.

⁸ *An Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, edited by G. H. R. Parkinson, Rutledge, 1988, p. 789.

⁹ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, p.41.

¹⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell , 1962, pp. 61- 62.

¹¹ Gadamer, Hans Georg, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated by David E. Linge, University of California Press, 1977, p. XI.

¹² The pro- philosophical hermeneutics and the eminent thinkers of this school of thought, cannot be placed in a stereotypical framework. As the phenomenology and the existentialism are lacking in any common and official readings and have absorbed diverse orientations, so the philosophical hermeneutics which has let in different branches and tendencies. Having said that, the foot print of Heidegger's perception in this school of thought can be seen across the board. We can perhaps come to know that the common denominator of all the branches in philosophical hermeneutics, is that they have distanced themselves from methodology and philosophical look at the interpretation and the concept topics. Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derida, despite all of their differences have common views that instead of presenting fundamental principles and methods of learning concepts and the effect of interpretation, just research on the interpretation and the concept themselves, and they have dragged the hermeneutics from the level of methodology and epistemology to the epistemology. The 20th century philosophical hermeneutics is more than anything else, indebted to the scientific research of two German philosophers, Martin Heidegger and his outstanding student, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

¹³ Ricoeur, Paul, *The conflict of interpretation*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, p. 43.

¹⁵ There are of course other lines of thought that might not directly relate to the science of hermeneutics and logical discussion, but link up to the concept of interpretation to a certain degree. For example, there are issues in Wittgenstein's (1889-1951) thinking that is appropriate to hermeneutics and thinkers like Karl Otto Apel (1922) who wanted to present a collection of his opinions regarding hermeneutics. Wittgenstein also sees humans in a hermeneutic condition, but instead of dealing with Ontological explanations, he describes the annexed appearance of the speech, in other words dealing with the language people use in common flattery. In this way, thinkers efforts are spent on the analysis and the explanation of the conceptive issues of interpretation and its expression. In a way, these thinkers are trying to establish a logical link among the meanings, the fact, and endorsement of the criteria and the validity of a statement.

Philosophers like Juren Habermas (1929), has incorporated subjects such as hermeneutic study, logic and the Dialectic science in his Frankfurt- based philosopher's research.

Among sociologists, for instance, are the likes of Max Webber and Alfred Schultz who tried to explain sociology by involving hermeneutics and phenomenology. Also there are some Psychologists, literary critics, historians and linguistics who explored new avenues with hermeneutics in mind.

¹⁶ Miraghai, Sayyedjalal, *Ijtehad va Noandishi*, Vol. 2, p.248.

¹⁷ Bernstein, Richard J., *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Chapter One: Shi'I exegesis evaluation from the beginning to date

1.1. Introduction

The subject of enquiry in the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is the word of God. It is geared to enable the interpreter to understand and clarify the origin and correct meaning of terms and concepts as well as the narration as inferred from the Qur'an itself. God's creation has not been in vain. There are definitely good reasons behind God's plan as he has stated in the Qur'an for his creation of the whole universe. One of the recurrent themes and motifs of his creation is to guide man to obey Him, follow the life path introduced by the prophets and avoid mischief and immorality. They are presented to man of his own free will and if he follows them, he can actualize the potential capabilities latent within him as a means to achieve perfection. Human beings at different times and places have been provided with a prophet whose advice and teachings were the most suitable for the betterment of people's spiritual and physical wellbeing. Indeed, it has been part of God's plan to guide and even steer His creatures towards Himself once He had created them.

Mohammad's companions enjoyed his presence and could ask him the interpretations of verses so they did not find it necessary to write them down.¹ After his death, Muslims resolved religious controversies and found the answers to religious enquiries and questions through referring to and asking the reliable companions and followers of Mohammad. In this way, the need to establish a scholarly and reliable source to find and collect the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an traditions arose. Many scholars and devoted Muslims were directed towards conducting discussions and research and made it the subject of their whole life, They dedicated their efforts and knowledge to this sacred job and considered it as their religious duty. Therefore, an interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is considered among the most elevated and highly esteemed subjects, since it deals with clarifying God's words which passed down to the prophet's heart through Divine inspiration.

The intimate companions of Mohammad launched an attempt to collect a comprehensive interpretation of the verses as they heard them from him. Fidelity was a very important issue, which they observed. They also did their best to guide people so that they might not go astray. Another group known as “followers” transmitted the words of the companions and Mohammad to those who are known as “the follower’s followers”.

The reason underlying any interpretation of the Qur’an is the necessity of knowing it as the source of knowledge, the best guide and advice as well as a pathway to go along to live one’s life. Thus, the surface reading of it does not help much since there are layers of meaning which should be gone through, contemplated and accepted to make the best of reading it.² This is confirmed by many verses in the Holy Qur’an stating that it is a book to be read and thought about deeply “(here is) the book which we have sent down unto thee [Mohammad], full of blessings, that they may meditate on its signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition.”³

In fact, the very basis of Islam is that it should only be accepted after the individual has thought deeply and rationally about its basic rules or else it is not considered as the true embracing of Islam.

The Holy Qur’an can be understood at different levels ranging from the surface meaning of verses to the symbolic, allegorical representation of God’s word. Absorbing the deep meaning of it prerequisites certain knowledge about the Arabic language, the history of Islam and the occasion of the transmission of each verse to Mohammad.. The very content of the Holy Qur’an with specific characteristics demands interpretation in different times and places. Some of the features are as follows:

The meaning of the Holy Qur’an is multidimensional. It is vast and deep. As Imam Ali has said, “It [the Holy Qur’an] appears simple and elegant but the core meaning is deep and hidden, its surprises are not transitory and the new points are endless.”⁴

The language of the Holy Qur’an is concise. It is therefore left to the reader to look for the details and occasions responsible for and relevant to the meaning of each verse.⁵ Qur’anic verses regarding how to say daily prayers, keeping the fast, do Hajj

and many other compulsory and non-obligatory Commands stand as good examples for the necessity of interpreting it.

The transmission of the Holy Qur'an was accomplished gradually in the course of 23 years. The verses were then rearranged, not chronologically, but rather according to God's plan of arranging them as we read them today. The Holy Qur'an is divided into Suras, each of which conveys a unique message to the reader. The teaching of the Holy Qur'an follows the meaningful linking of the facts in each Sura.

The Holy Qur'an is not the word of human beings, it is God's word and the speaker belongs not to this earthly existence but rather to the intelligible world. In this book one finds concepts and terms such as angels, God's attributes, miracles, the world hereafter and many other points regarding the Divine realm.⁶ It then justifies why understanding the Holy Qur'an involves further investigation for the meaning of words which should be presented to the readers in a suitable tone and language not to be misunderstood. That is why almost all Muslims pay great attention to the interpretation of verses to get the real intended meaning.

1.2. Analytical examination of Shiite exegesis

There are many instances in interpretations in terms of difference of method, style and variety in the way of treating issues of Qur'anic verses. There are reasons for each of the methods and orientations while behind the discussions there are the motive, knowledge, insight and inclination as the interpreters understand them; it is not fair for a researcher and interpreter of the Qur'an to overlook them. These methods should be identified and studied while the causes of orientations and interpretative taints should be found. Doubtless, one of the merits of understanding an interpretation and its development is to get familiar with the reforms in the science of interpretation and the methods achieved regarding the form of interpreting and inferring of the meaning of the Holy Qur'an. The reader will be guided by this knowledge to various methods and the best way to accomplish this.

Familiarity with and study of methods determines the ground for comparing interpretations and consequently the ways of reaching the major message of the Qur'an. It also shows us the shortest and the most comprehensive path among a variety of paths. On the other hand, human experience and the process of the

development of interpretation reveals this truth to us: that the best paths are not taken by one, neither is the whole truth before a single individual. At the end of the day, we are not to choose the best path; we should always strive to understand the criteria and principles, while understanding the methods for identifying the best interpretations. In the light of this striving, the message of revelation is perceived according to the needs and questions.

But we should not forget that among so many methods and styles some have a foundational aspect and are known as part of the principles and the interpretative foundations, while some of the differences are rooted in the knowledge and intellectual and social inclinations of the interpreters. Therefore, what is concerned with the quality of the inference of the message and the discovery of the meaning of the Qur'an and what is effective in the fate of our understanding are all regarded as a part of the interpretative principles. This chapter attempts to make the reader familiar with the development of Shiite exegeses since the time of their emergence and to show the ups and downs throughout history.

1.2.1. First Century: The Origin of Exegesis

The history of writing interpretations and the introduction of illustrative data about the Qur'anic verses and chapters in Shi'ism can be traced in the work of Imam Ali (A.S.). What has been reported from the Prophet about interpretation is narrated by the Followers or followers of the Followers since the beginning of the abolition of the ban on writing (with the coming of ' *umar ibn Abdul Aziz* in the 90s A.H.).⁷ However, in Shi'ism, it was shaped from the very beginning by narration, writing and compilation of interpretative materials by Imam Ali (A.S.) and his disciples; they did not wait for the abolition of writing by the caliphs.⁸ For example, *ibn Abbās* the renowned disciple of Ali (S.A.), *ibn Masūd*, *Jāber ibn Abdullāh Ansāri*, *Ṭbay ibn Ka'b* and *Meysam Tammār* were connected with the household of the Prophet and educated by their teachings. They played a major role in clarifying the Qur'anic concepts or writing an independent book of exegesis.⁹ Therefore, first we will start with Imam Ali's book and relate it to the interpretation of this first century and the emergence and establishment of the science of interpretation in the Shiite school.

Although we have no access to a book called Imam Ali's interpretation and his interpretative materials have been narrated in a dispersed way in both Shiite and Sunni sources, doubtless the Imam is the first interpreter of the Qur'an after the Prophet. A great number of traditions attributed to him are devoted to interpretation.¹⁰ The other point is that the history of writing interpretation and compiling collections of explanatory information about Qur'anic verses and Chapters in Shi'ism should start with "the book of Ali ibn Abū Talib". It is generally believed that his book is merely the Holy Qur'an. But from what is received from records it was not merely a collection of Qur'anic verses; it also included discussions and explanations about verses in need of interpretation wherever there is a reason mentioned for revealing the Qur'anic verses in the first place, interpretation of one verse by another verse, a verse is remembered, one verse abrogates another; or a jurisprudential statement is alluded to.¹¹ A tradition says that the Imam mentioned the interpretation and explanation of each verse and explained the verses that signified a *halal* (permitted) or *haram* (forbidden) argument.¹² It has been mentioned in one such tradition that the Imam's explanations and interpretations were given in such a way that nothing was overlooked while they were a response to posterity. This claim cannot be an exaggeration because Ali (A.S.) is the first Muslim, the gate to the city of knowledge and the companion of the Prophet. He was always with the Prophet, at home and abroad, and got satiated with the spring of revelation. In this regard he asserts, "There is no verse descending down that I do not know from where, when, during the day or night, in the plain or mountain it came."¹³ That is why Ibn Atiyyah Gharnāṭī places the Imam at the heart of interpreters, a knowledgeable one and a scholar.¹⁴ Siūti also asserts, "The four caliphs are the first interpreters of the Qur'an; the narration of the first three is scarce while Ali (A.S.) has been frequently narrated."¹⁵ Therefore, according to historical evidence and the proclamation of the infallible Imams, the first one after the Prophet who practiced interpretation and to whom many traditions are attributed is Imam Ali (A.S.).

After Imam Ali (A.S.) there was a small group of his adherents who attempted to defend him. The social and political conditions of the time did not allow the Companions to have easy access to him and therefore receive a direct interpretation and narration of Hadith. But despite all restrictions, a few people bravely managed to take steps to preserve the prophetic tradition and promotion of its culture and hand

over his interpretative ideas to the following generation in the form of Traditions. During that period of history interpretations usually did not go beyond the limit of narrating traditions and explaining the vocabulary. The narration is parallel to and a continuation of the Prophetic tradition and the Alavi culture. But this trend would slowly change at later stages. Narrations are compiled in different ways. One group would try to compile the interpretative works and record them while another group would combine the tradition with insight.¹⁶

One who collected interpretations after Imam Ali (A.S) and left a great impact is Ibn Abbās¹⁷ whose interpretative works, fortunately, have been reported in a number of different ways.¹⁸

If we overlook the infallible Imams, other great Followers like Abdullah ibn Masūd, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Maytham Tammār and Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansārī are among the interpreters who were connected to the household of revelation. They made great efforts to clarify the Qur'anic concepts and words and they wrote books and treatises in Qur'anic exegesis.¹⁹ These efforts continued in the following periods while in the age of the Followers many Shiite interpreters or those in contact with Shi'ism introduced and wrote commentaries. It was at this time that the writing of interpretation started and grew with the writings of Sa'id ibn Jābir.²⁰ After him, Mujāhed ibn Jabr, who was ibn Abbās's disciple, took over. Sunnis quoted many of their traditions and interpretative works from him. In short, from the extant bulk of reports it could be concluded that the culture of the Prophetic household in the science of interpretation and its writings have played an important role in an indirect way, also that Imam Ali's disciples, despite all difficulties and problems encountered, were able to play an active role in Qur'anic exegesis.

1.2.2. Second Century: Exegesis and Divergence from Tradition

After the first period, the lifting of the ban on writing and publicizing the compilation of Hadith took another route, diverging from other sciences and establishing its own independent school of Hadith. Muslim scholars in general and the disciples of the infallible Imams in particular ventured to write and organize some works as interpretation. What had been written earlier, though entitled the Qur'an, was actually a collection of traditions and reports of statements using traditional syntax,

records of the reason for and historical events which were behind the descent of the verses.. On the other hand, religious differences, the increase in theological debates, the hybridization of different ideas and the distinguished orientations of the infallible Imams were compiled, while the organization of these works was criticism of opposing ideas. That is why Imam Ali's disciples interpreted the verses for purposes of clarifying theologically ambiguous verses or those about confronting opponents. This does not imply that the companions of the infallible Imams were ignorant of other parts but they felt it more urgent to defend the household of the Prophet. They regarded the cultural frontier in terms of Qur'anic exegesis as the only way forward for that defence.

Among the most important interpretations in this century written definitely by the disciples of the infallible Imams is the Qur'anic interpretation of Abū Abdullah Yamanī Tūwūs ibn Kīsān²¹ who was a companion of Imam Zayn al-ābidīn and narrated the interpretation from ibn Abbās. Another interpreter of the *Tābe'īn* (the followers) is Atiyyah ibn Sa'īd al-'Awfi who was close to Imam Bāqir. It is said that his interpretation was in five volumes.²² In this period also there is Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mar, the disciple of Abū al-Aswad Du'lī. The latter, we know, was a disciple of Imam Ali (A.S) and the founder of the science of syntax who put in the vowels of Arabic words (*e'rāb*).

Also among those well-known in the science of interpretation and who were disciples of Imam Zayn al-Abidīn, Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq (A.S), we may mention Jābir ibn Yazīd Jo'fī, Muhammad ibn Sā'ib Kalbī, Ismā'īl ibn Abd al-Raḥmān Kūfī and Abū Muhammad Qurashī known as Sudaī Kabīr.²³ Abū Ḥamzah Thumālī, one of the disciples of Imam Sajjād, Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq (A.S) too compiled an independent interpretation but, unfortunately, it has been lost.²⁴ It is time now to have a brief look at the famous interpretations named after Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq (A.S).²⁵

1.2.2.1. Interpretation of Imam Baqir (A.S)

In Al-Fihrist ibn Nadīm asserts that the book of interpretation of Imam Bāqir Muhammad ibn Ali (A.S) has been narrated by Abū al-Jārūd Zīād ibn Mondhir, head of the Jārūdiyyah.²⁶ In the traditional sources and principles received from the

infallible Imams many traditions have been narrated by him in the form of interpretation of verses. Unfortunately, they have been reported in a haphazard way, not compiled in an independent collection. The pivot of most of the debates is to state similarities, explain and overcome problems in some of the verses. The Imam also educated many disciples for social and political conditions for discussing many issues had changed and so the ground was prepared for active promotion of knowledge compared to conditions at the time of the other Imams. In addition the Imam helped many of his disciples to compile books and treatises: interpretations by Abān ibn Taqlab,²⁷ Abū Basīr, Yaḥyā ibn Abū al-Qāsim Asadī, Abu Ḥamza Thumālī and Jābir ibn Yazīd Ju'fī.²⁸

But the interpretation of Abū al-Jārūd Zīād ibn Mondhir, whom ibn Nadīm recognizes as the head of the Jārūdiyya sect, and many of his traditions have been incorporated into the interpretation of Ali ibn Ibrāhīm. Nevertheless, despite the discussions about Abū al-Jārūdī, his interpretation of Imam Bāqir (A.S) is a famous one as the first referred to by ibn Nadīm when discussing interpretative books. This book was composed using knowledge gleaned from/ the Household of the Prophet.²⁹

1.2.2.2. Interpretations attributed to Imam Sādiq (A.S)

Many traditions were bequeathed from Imam Sādiq (A.S) on different subjects especially in terms of interpretation narrated and reported in a dispersed way in traditional books. In some cases his disciples compiled them but they were lost at a later stage. Still two specific books entitled *Misbāḥ al-Sharīʿa* published in Iran and Lebanon (Beirut), and another interpretation like the majority of the traditional books, have been attributed to Imam Sādiq (A.S) as documents or quotations. It is obvious from the words introduced by the Imam at the beginning of each chapter when giving thanks and respects himself that at least we can say the book was not written by the Imam. The book is mostly about moral and ideological matters. But the Imam's words in *Ḥaqāq al-Tafsīr* of Abū 'abd al-Raḥmān Salmī are about interpretative and analytical topics.³⁰

1.2.3. The Third Century: The Compilation Period

Despite the fact that not many works have remained from this period, since the Household of the Prophet, especially Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq (A.S), have

educated many disciples and introduced novel subjects into interpretation, those that did survive were handed over to later disciples by the companions of the two Imams and became independent and distinguished books of interpretation.

In fact, the efforts of the infallible Imams bear fruit in this century while the science of interpretation achieves an independent identity. Among the most important interpretations definitely written during the century by disciples of the infallible Imams we can include: *Tafsīr al-Qurʿan* by Yunis ibn abd al-Raḥmān Asadī,³¹ *Tafsīr* Hassan ibn Ali ibn Faḍāl ibn Kūfī³² and *Tafsīr* Hassan ibn Maḥbūb Sarrād about whom Kashī says, “He is subject to consensus, that is to say he is one whose authority and the genuineness of ideology is never doubted by his companions.” Ibn Nadīm regards one of his works as *Tafsīr*.³³ Another interpretation of this period belongs to Ali ibn Maḥzīāār Aḥwāzi called *Tafsīr ibn Maḥzīār*. He was the representative of Imam Reza (A.S).³⁴

The interpretation of Fazl ibn Shāzān Neishābūri, one of the companions of Imam Rezā and Imam Javād (A.S), is another such composition.³⁵ Of course books reported from the companions of the Imams in interpretation are plentiful. We do not even know whether some of them have been influenced by the culture of the infallible Imams or if they belong to a period before there was a Shiite identity. It is not possible to judge them since most of these works have been destroyed or at least are not available. Now we will refer to one of the important interpretations of this period to have survived that has an interpretative and traditional and in some respects theological and religious feel. It is *Tafsīr al-Ḥibrī*. This book is by Abū Abdullah Hussein Ibn Ḥakam Ibn Muslim Ḥibrī Kūfī compiled in Arabic in a single volume. The author is one of the distinguished men of Shiite Zaydiyyah and of the well-known narrators of the third century A.H. He was from Kufa and a contemporary and narrator of the ninth Imam, that is to say Imam Javād (A.S). The interpretation includes 150 traditions. A hundred traditions are concerned with verses about the infallible Imams, 30 traditions are about their virtues, while the remaining 20 are about different subjects of precepts, history and sermons.³⁶

Therefore, this book is not a comprehensive interpretative book of Hadith and tradition neither is it a collection of interpretative traditions about the status and virtue of the infallible Imams. Like the interpretations of Forāt Kūfī and Ayyāshi,

this book is of a narrative aspect. One can find nothing like explanations, criticism and jurisprudence of the interpreter.³⁷

1.2.4. Fourth Century: Establishment of Exegesis from the Viewpoint of Tradition

The fourth century saw a flowering of Muslims' knowledge. The ideas in the arena of Islamic culture exhibited a rather good growth during this century.. Of great importance is the fact that by this time social and political reactions and conflicts had decreased to a great extent. The infallible Imams made use of the opportunity and educated many disciples and sent them throughout the Muslim world. In this period, the disciples of the Imams wrote a number of books on different subjects, but especially about the Holy Qur'an and its interpretation. Knowledge of interpretation was established by Shiite identity while the traditional method has been recognized as the only way to compile. Shiite scholars have seriously competed with other schools of thought and introduced outstanding works in diverse fields.

Also in the fourth century Shi'ism officially gained a foothold in parts of the Muslim world or at least it was officially recognized as a defined religious identity. The Fatimids in North Africa, the Hamdanians in Northern Mesopotamia and the family of Buyeh in Iraq, Fars and parts of Rey and Isfahan established governments inclined to Shi'ism while Shiite scholars enjoyed greater freedom and security for introducing scientific works, for restrictions were removed to a considerable degree.³⁸

Thus the Shiite interpreters recorded and classified works of the past. Koleini and Sadūq compiled the traditional works in this century. Tabari also compiled interpretative works and according to Sunni doctrine. Scientific centres emerged, libraries were established, the script was improved and paper, as a convenient means for writing, was at the disposal of Muslims. Thus it was possible to record the writings and thus preserve them. Among the most famous interpretations of the century are those by Ali ibn Ibrāhīm Qumi, Forāt Kūfi, Ayyashi, Nómāni and Muhammad ibn Qāsim Ester-Abādi known as Tafsīr of Imam Hassan Askari.³⁹ Unfortunately, some of these interpretations were destroyed, replaced or as is the case with Tafsīr Ayyashi, got lost in parts.

The important point in this period of interpretation is the influence that interpreters of the age of the Companions and the Followers received from the interpretation of the infallible Imams and Shi'ism. Many interpreters were influenced by interpretative works such as those by Ibn Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubay ibn Kab and even the direct disciples of Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq (A.S). This trend may be observed in the narration of people like 'Akramah, Qutāda, Maqātil ibn Suleimān, A'mash, Sufiān Thūri and Farrā' who are all well-known interpreters. It is natural to say that the science of interpretation has been unwillingly influenced by the great culture of the infallible Imams - the Sunni interpretations have been scientifically indebted to them..⁴⁰

1.2.5. Fifth Century: The Beginning of the Flourishing of Exegesis Based on Independent Reasoning

This century starts a tumultuous period after passing through a century of cultural and intellectual challenges, to the extent that it is called the Golden Age of exegesis. During that century Greek philosophy found its way into the arena of Islam, various works entered the arena of Islamic sciences while followers of different political schools set Islam as their field for research. Significant books have been introduced in Hadith and interpretation. Ideologists and theologians shaped their schools of thought and paved the ground for their jurisprudential thoughts. Philology, literature and oratory started to bloom; the number of poets increased while the subject of their poetry shifted from nomadic concepts to those of civilization.⁴¹

Jorjī Zaydān asserts, "This century is the golden age of Islam. The government of Muslims reached its epoch with wealth, civilization and supremacy during the century. Most Islamic sciences emerged while the most important sciences of others were translated into Arabic".⁴²

The important point of this period is the freedom of exchange of ideas and the introduction of different religions together with the fact that each religious group was able to expound its philosophy in peace. Among them Shi'ism, satiated with the source of revelation, proclaimed its inclinations through the language of ones like Sharīf Razi, Seyyed Murtazā, Sheikh Mufid and Sheikh Tūsi while offering dynamic interpretations to the inhabitants of their age. Unlike earlier centuries, the Shiite

science of interpretation here was orally based on the jurisprudential and rational method while other writings are not in the form of narration of Hadith and adherence to the traditional method. Many interpretations were committed to paper during this century. In addition to the works by Seyyed Razi, Seyyed Murtazā and Sheikh Tūsi, other interpretations were written down but unfortunately no longer exist : *Tafsīr Najjāshi*⁴³, *Al-Bustān fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'an* by Abū Sa'īd Ismā'il ibn Ali ibn Hussein Samān⁴⁴ and the interpretative work *Al-Murāshid men Ghorar Al-Fawā'id* by Abū Al-Fatḥ Muhammad Ibn Ali Karājaki.⁴⁵ Of course, Sheikh Mofid in his various works and some of his Qur'anic writings introduced many interpretative issues whose volume and theological and rational inclinations no less than the specific interpretative writings contemporary with his.⁴⁶ And if we regard Sheikh Al-Ra'īs Abū Ali Sinā (Avicenna) as Shiite, he has also interpreted parts of the Holy Qur'an, such as the chapter "The Most High", "The Verse of Light", the eleventh verse of the chapter "The Distinguished", the chapters of "The Opening", "The Daybreak" and "The Men" as well as verses related to the topics of revelation and miracles.

1.2.6. Sixth Century: Development of Scholarly Individual Reasoning (Ijtihād) and the Contribution of Other Sciences

At the end of the fifth century the Ijtihādi method had become established and went on to flourish. Doubtless, the utilization of reason in the history of interpretation is the outcome of different causes and elements. But it was begun at a time when there was no further access to the source of revelation while the use of the Prophet's interpretation together with new questions had emerged. The Companions consulted the Prophet for interpretation while he was alive since he was responsible for explaining and interpreting the Holy Qur'an.⁴⁷ Naturally, there would have been no realization of Ijtihād and verbal and rational scrutiny. The Prophet handed over the responsibility for scientific and political guidance to His Family. He repeatedly announced that the Holy Qur'an and His Family could not be separated from each other.⁴⁸ But this message was not taken seriously by the public. Only one part of the community followed the Prophet's family. At the end of the Minor Occultation, the Shiite community contacted the Household and a group of Shiite interpreters resolved the problems of interpretation by using and compiling the narrations of this Household. Nevertheless, it is clear that not all Qur'anic verses were interpreted by

them. At least, we might say that not all of them have reached us. Here the foundations for *Individual reasoning* as a contribution to interpretation were laid little by little. It was an interpretation based on thinking about the Qur'an. The new method was realized by utilizing vocabulary, Arabic grammar and so on.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that one of the reasons for the move toward *Ijtihād* in interpretation was this same Household. By means of their commentary, they showed in a practical way how to think about the verses and use the rules for proper understanding in interpretation. Thus interpretation is possible through the documentation of vocabulary, Arabic grammar, syntax, comparison with other verses and sorting similar ones as well as interpreting the Holy Qur'an through using the book itself together with reasoning.⁴⁹ Of course, there are other reasons why *Individual reasoning* became of some importance for example, the Islamic world would be subject to drastic cultural changes. Various waves of human reasoning belonging to the heritage of the Greek, Iranian and Indian cultures and civilizations made themselves felt throughout the Islamic lands. The fierce arguments of the Jews and Christians over the Muslims were active while every such change became a motivation for scholars, especially the interpreters for presenting their discussions in a way to respond to the needs and problems of the period. Great works of interpretation, like those of the fourth century Shiites, emerged during this period. Some of the most important ones include *Majma' Al-Bayān* and *Jawāmi' Al-Jāmi'* by Sheikh Tabarsi and *Rawḍ Al-Jinān* by Abū Al-Fotūḥ Rāzī as well as *Fiqh Al-Qur'an* by Qutb Al-Dīn Sa'īd Ibn Abdullāh Rāvandī, who was a disciple of Sheikh Tūsī.⁵⁰

At the end of the century, there appeared an interpretation entitled *Al-Muntakhab min Tafsīr Al-Qur'an* by Abū Abdullāh Muhammad Ibn Mansūr Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs, known as Ibn Idrīs, who is the author of the famous book *Al-Sarā'ir*. He was the one who, after a long time, dared to criticize the ideas of Sheikh Tūsī and inaugurate the way for interpretation on this basis.

1.2.7. Seventh Century: Decline of Exegesis

The Mongol invasion at the beginning of the century is one of the greatest events whose devastating consequences cannot be forgotten. It affected Islamic culture, science and civilization.

If there is a time for prosperity and decline for every civilization and accumulation of knowledge, the apex of the science of interpretation started in the fourth century and ended in the sixth century. From the beginning of the seventh century the science of interpretation in Shi'ism became static for many centuries. It was completely eclipsed and in darkness. From the genesis of the science of interpretation in Shi'ism it gathered momentum but when the Muslim world - and especially the Shiite one - faced a number of problems, it not only stopped but also receded. Yet interpretation in the Sunni world was still taking place. *Tafsīr Kabīr* or *Mafātih Al-Ghayb* of Fakhr Rāzi appeared at the beginning of this century, while the interpretation of *Al-Jāmi' Li-Ahkām Al-Qur'an* of Ghortabi emerged in another part of the Muslim world.. This movement continued with the work of *Anwār Al-Tanzīl* of Baiḍāwī and later in *Qarā'ib Al-Qur'an* of Neishābūri and the like and they all gradually affected the whole world of Islam as well.⁵¹

The first cause of this decline was the political and social conditions brought about by the immense pressures of the Mongol invasion as well as the Crusades. The second cause was that since late in the fifth century when a severe assault was made on Sheikh Mofid and Sheikh Tūsi in Baghdad, the Shiite houses were subject to plunder, the libraries and schools were burned down and Shiite scholars were attacked from every direction. Martyrdom, imprisonment, exile and disappearance started at that time. Even if the Shiite scholars were still able to write books they could not pass them from hand to hand. That is why in some reports and lists we come across some works of interpretation which have been lost. Examples include *Yāqūtāt Al-Sirāt*,⁵² *Naqd Al-Tanzīl* of Khāja Nasīr Toūsi,⁵³ *Shawāhid Al-Qur'an* by Aḥmad Ibn Tāwūs⁵⁴ who was the brother of Razi Al-Dīn Ibn Tāwūs, and finally *Al-Faḥs wa Al-Bayān an Asrār Al-Qur'an* by Moḥaqqiq Ḥilli.⁵⁵

However, a few very limited interpretations have survived from this century. As an instance we can mention *Naḥj Al-Bayān 'an Kashf Ma'āni Al-Qur'an* by Sheibāni which is an interpretation in Arabic; it included the whole Qur'an and was written during the era of the Abbasid caliph Must'āsim and gifted to the Mustansiriyya Library of Baghdad by the writer. Another example is *Daqāiq Al-Ta'wil wa Haqāiq Al-Tanzīl* by Abū Al-Makārim Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Hassan Wāḥi that is in

Farsi. The writer has interpreted the Qur'an selectively while his approach is Shiite and carried on by theological criticism of the ideas of others.

1.2.8. Eighth Century: Cultural Decadence

The Mongol invasion and the political deterioration that that spelt out for Muslims unprecedentedly slowed down Muslim culture in all respects so that its impact lasted for centuries. It also meant stagnation for the jurisprudential and rational movement in most parts of the Muslim world. Doubtless, the invasion might not have taken place if conditions had not prepared the ground for the enemy's greed. According to history, the prejudiced wars among the Islamic sects, especially those between the Shiite and the Shafei' as well the one between the Hanafites and the Shafei's, had ruined Iranian cities even prior to the devastating Mongol invasion. The differences were so extensive in Shahre Rey, Neishabour and Isfahan that they led to homicide, together with the ruin of schools and other buildings..⁵⁶

During this century then, the social and political conditions of Iran became even worse. After the overthrow of the Mongolian Hulakan Ilkhans, religious conflicts, a deteriorating economic situation, the state of confusion and the rise in taxes which became even heavier after the imposition by government officials, as well as the dynasties that fought for imposing power and government, all deeply and adversely affected the social conditions and security of Iran, Iraq and present-day Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. Of course confusion, plunder, ransacking of libraries, occupation and the resulting cruelty of both feudal lords and bandits in neighbourhoods prevented the establishment of security, freedom of thought, growth of knowledge, promotion of science and the utilization of intellect. Such conditions had a detrimental effect not only on interpretation and Islamic sciences but all sciences. Under such circumstances, the best books had writing in the margins and explanatory notes. Here interpretations with double margins and explanations are selected and reselected. Baiḍāwī's interpretation is selected by Kashshāf and Mafātiḥ Al-ghaib. Nevertheless, we can see the margin and chronological explanations written on this interpretation..⁵⁷

It would not be remarkable were it merely a matter of one or two explanations and interpretative margins. This movement reached its summit in a specific historical

period and gained momentum to the extent that it makes man wonder at it. Why does such a thing happen? What is the cause of this movement? Doubtless, such a movement takes place in specific periods when stagnation and stasis dominate the culture of a society. Authors and interpreters were obliged to write explanations in margins instead of new material.⁵⁸ Later movements of Externalism, Traditionalism and even the development of an inclination to mysticism emerged from such social and cultural conditions. Likewise blind prejudices, religious hostilities and fights among the sects appear in the atmosphere of such dictatorial and religious governments which are removed from rationality. Therefore, except for a few works of interpretation there have been no signs of novelty, creativity or powerful scientific movement over centuries. Still here and there books were written in some parts of the Middle East. They were not passed from hand to hand; neither did they pave the way for stability and dynamism. One such attempt to introduce an interpretative work which has survived is

Jalā' Al-Adhhān wa Jelā' Al-Ahzān by Abū Al-Maḥāsīn Hussein ibn Hassan Jorjāni. It is an interpretation in Farsi in ten volumes, one of the important Farsi interpretative Shi'ite works of the eighth century, written for the people of the day. In fact, according to the research carried out, this interpretation is the one written by Abū Al-Fotūh Rāzi that is to say Rawḍ Al-Jinān, which has been modified in vocabulary and style of writing and appeared with a new title and had a new birth.⁵⁹ It was a common practice among scholars of the past that whenever a book appeared written in an old style of prose deemed difficult for the public to grasp with ease, scholars would edit and change it. Thus *Jorjāni* could change the book through this adaptation and selection and modify the prose in a way to be suitable for the age. He made the phrases sound more attractive. The method of interpretation is the same adopted by *Abū Al-Fotūḥ Rāzi*. It is also known as a "Gāzir" interpretation. It was published in 1958, by Tehran University Publications and edited by Jalāl al-Din Hussein Armavi. Later, 'Azizullah Atārudi prepared the technical indexes including the ones for chapters, tales, subjects, names, words and terms in an independent volume and published it as *Miftāḥ Tafsīr Gāzir*.⁶⁰

1.2.9. Ninth Century: Writing Jurisprudential Interpretation

Immorality, distractions of the mind, disharmony among different strata of the confused and suppressed people of Iran and other Islamic countries after the reign of Genghiz Khan as well as the hostility, plunder and massacre carried out by Timūrid troops meant that life during these times was very harsh.. Yet the ground was paved for Sufism, the influence of Sufi ideas and the establishment of numerous monasteries. This trend led to isolation, lack of participation in social and political movements and escape from the government's legitimate religious base. In fact this new movement was welcomed by those who were fed up with political despotism accompanied by religious justifications, while cruel and despotic powers might not have been too displeased with this turn of events.⁶¹

The important point about the popularity of mystical books, Sufi prose and verse in Farsi and interpretations such as the one by Shāh Nématullāh Kermāni and *Al-Muḥiṭ Al-A'zam* by Seyyed ḥaydar āmoliand Gharāib Al-Qur'an of Neishābūri and dozens of similar works of interpretation should be sought in the socially and politically turbulent conditions of those centuries.⁶²

However, during this period except for the Sufi Qur'anic interpretations there is no other significant book. Even rational and jurisprudential exegeses were eclipsed by these Sufi writings and even copies of rational exegeses such as *Tibiān* remained inaccessible. One important point is that during this century there were some jurisprudential writings and sometimes *Aīāt Al-Aḥkām* (the legal injunctions of the Qur'an) the most famous of which is *Kanz Al-ʾirfān fī Fiqḥ Al-Qur'an* by Fāzel Miqdād. Other interpretations written in this century include *'Oīūn Al-Tafsīr* by Kamāluddīn Hassan ibn Al-Mulā Shams Al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Hassan Esterābādi who died towards the end of the ninth century A.H. and also wrote *Maṣāʾirij Al-Suūl wa Madārij Al-Ma'moul fī Tafsīr Ayāt Al-Aḥkām*.⁶³

Another work of interpretation of this century is that of Abul Fazl Deylami in two large volumes. He interpreted several verses but mainly concentrated on theology and the defence of Shi'ism. According to Aqā Bozorg this interpretation still exists.⁶⁴

1.2.10. Tenth Century: Revival of Interpretation

After a period of silence and great pressure on Shi'ism especially in Iran, the scenario changed with the coming of the Safavids. Little by little the Shiite intellectual and cultural movement emerged. Shiite scholars from different corners of the Islamic world turned to interpretation in addition to other writings. The interesting point is that the Shiite scholars became doubly interested in writing for the most part in Farsi (not Arabic) which complimented the spread of Persian literature and was aimed at the common people.⁶⁵ Of course, this movement was further extended later so that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.H. most Qur'anic interpretations appeared in Farsi.

Also parallel to the rule of the Safavids and the execution of the Shari'ah, we witness the upsurge of the jurisprudential interpretative works, the introduction of Shari'ah and much progress in this branch of the science of interpretation. Although the structure of Qur'anic research of *fiqh* in Shi'ism unlike the Sunnis is conducted through subject wise method but the general subjects of this group of interpretation is with *Aīāt Al- Aḥkām* (the legal injunctions of the Qur'an) and Qur'anic precepts. Among the most important ones of the century are *Zobdat Al-Bayān* by Ardabīlī, *Maḍan Al-'Irfān* by Ibrāhīm ibn Hassan Warāq and *Aīāt Al-Aḥkām* (the legal injunctions of the Qur'an) of Mulā Muhammad ibn Hassan Tabasi.⁶⁶

1.2.11. Eleventh Century: An End to Stagnation in Shiite Interpretation

As stated earlier, after a problematic period, Islamic science gradually began to flourish. This movement gained even more momentum during the eleventh century because the Safavid reign ushered in the high point of religious activities and proved to be a fertile ground for Shiite cultural efforts. Shiite scholars came to Iran from different parts especially from Jabal 'Amil and went from Iran to the Indian subcontinent and China, providing an opportunity for Shiite culture to enter those areas and the Farsi language to flourish.

The principle foundation for the establishment of the Safavid government was Sufism, which manifested itself in a spiritual political system which won the Safavid government a victory. But when the Safavids chose Shi'ism and jurisprudence and appointed the *Sheikh Al-Islām* to be responsible for legal matters, tension started

between the Sufis and jurists which had social and cultural repercussions, affecting those scholars who were inclined towards mysticism as well as its great scholars such as Ibn Arabi, Sayyid Ḥaidar Amoli and Ghazzālī. This movement could be said to have achieved its aims when we notice that great efforts were made so that serious hybridization – at least socially – between official Sufism and Shi'ism took place. The appearance of scholars like Faiz Kāshāni, who made a special ideology of philosophy, together with Shi'ism and mysticism caused strong reactions to himself and those like him and created a group hostile to Sufis and similar movements which led to further Traditionalism.⁶⁷ The interpretative works written in this century can be classified according to method, content and orientation:

1. With the introduction of the Safavid Shiite government, the execution of the Shari'ah according to Shi'ism was introduced. Thus the tendency to writing down the legal injunctions of the Qur'an increased and people like Fāzil Javād, the author of *Masālik Al-Afḥām fī Aḥkām Al-Qur'an* as well as Esterābādi and Mullā Ali Tūnī⁶⁸ and the written margins that appeared on verses of precepts of Shiite scholars like Moqaddas Ardabili and *Kanz Al-'Irfān* of Fāzil Meqdād came to the fore.
2. Margin explanations (instead of writing and composition) was still prevalent. Some writers filled even more than one margin like Bahā' Al-Din 'Ameli who has written marginal annotation on both *Majma' Al-Bayān* and *Kashshāf* as well as on *Anwār Al-Tanīl* of Baiḍāwī.
3. There is an increase in setting out interpretations on philosophical and mystical religions such as those by Mullā Sadrā, writings of Sheikh Bahā, the interpretations of Mullā Shams Gilāni⁶⁹ and the one by Lāhijī.⁷⁰

1.2.12. Twelfth Century: Tendency towards the Traditional Method

In the early eleventh century A.H. there appeared a creed among Shiite scholars that was more superficial and rigid than Externalism and the Hanbalites. This creed, later called Traditionalism, found some followers from the beginning of the twelfth century in Iran. Some scholars also defended it in a number of cities. They mostly emphasized the tales of the historians and banned reasoning and *Ijtihād* (Individual reasoning). This creed did not recognize the authority of *ẓawāhir* (the apparent

meaning) of the Qur'an. It prescribed invocation by Qur'anic verses merely in the light of the traditions of the Prophet's Family. It believed that the Qur'an was addressed to the Prophet and His Family; others could not understand it unless there was a relevant interpretation by this Family. Amin Esterābādī, its founder, only wanted to validate the Sunnah and under different excuses reject the other well-known reasons for the inference of religious laws (the Holy Book, Sunnah,⁷¹ Intellect, and Consensus). The main objection was directed against reasoning. This inclination towards Traditionalism can be regarded as a great Shiite catastrophe.⁷² Naturally the movement had a drastic influence on its adherent writers. Gradually it promoted a sort of ossification and Externalism in the religious texts of the seminaries. So emphasis was put on compiling traditions rather than Ijtihād and what is signified in the verse: to follow in the footsteps of earlier ways with a new order and form. Interpretative works such as *Al-Borhān* and *Nūr Al-Thaqalain* appeared during this period.⁷³ Other interpretations *Individual reasoning*, such as *Sāfi*, *Kanz Al-Daqaiq* and *Al-Jawhar Al-Thamin*, were influenced by this.. But it was obvious that it could not resist the wave of doubts, problems and defects of the traditional method of interpretation. If writing such works is naturally a suitable response to a demand, it does not mean that the traditional method will be able to respond to interpretation and provide the solution to problems related to ideological issues and precepts. This is not to mention that the traditions received from the Prophet and His Family about interpretation did not include all verses. In many verses about which there are no traditions it meant to reject reasoning in understanding of the Qur'anic verses. The other point was the weakness of some of the traditions, which were on every subject. Elevated epistemological meaning and exaggeration, distortion as well as their utilization all required scrutiny of the document and its reference. Such a task required *Ijtihād* and reasoning.⁷⁴

However, the twelfth century was a time for development and promotion through traditional methods which had been the reason for the independent emergence of the science of interpretation during the early centuries. This development of change in interpretation required such a new approach - despite the fact that no single method was favoured then - and evolved after ten centuries with an exclusive claim and greatly challenged others.

It seems that this movement grew up as a reaction against going to extremes adopted by a group of interpreters over the preceding centuries who had attempted to combine and hybridize philosophical and mystical arguments, pretending to be following the path of the Prophet and the infallible Imam, its adherents being a group of simple-minded people and laymen. This very fact motivated severe, long and sometimes cruel conflicts during that age.

1.2.13. Thirteenth Century: Another Revival of the Jurisprudential Method

During the second half of the twelfth century a great Shiite scholar known as Wahīd Beḥbahāni who was talented in rational reasoning and thinking attacked the school of Traditionalism. At first this school penetrated some cities and scientific centres of Mesopotamia, and quickly caught on. However, Iranian cities received it rather less enthusiastically, for example, in Isfahan with the emergence of Osūlī scholars (adherents of the principles of jurisprudence) during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This movement approached its end⁷⁵ while the teaching of philosophy and the principles abandoned in the earlier centuries was revived. Although the school of Traditionalism had influenced the science of *fiqh* and the principles at the beginning, since Shiite interpretation was indirectly influenced, it took a long time to undergo reform. For instance, Seyyed Abdullaḥ Shobbar wrote interpretation during the thirteenth century; his two interpretations were apparently an attempt to combine reasoning and tradition.⁷⁶ However, its traditional tendency was more conspicuous. Muhammad Amin Hamadāni wrote the interpretative work *Al-Dur Al-Naẓīm* from a philosophical angle. The Barqāni dynasty, well-known and prolific in compiling Hadiths on interpretation, did not completely overlook *Individual reasoning* interpretation.⁷⁷

However, all evidence shows that the thirteenth century on the whole was a century of advance and paved the way for reform, and indeed foresaw it in the development of interpretation, vigilance and a return to the Qur'an.⁷⁸

1.2.14. Fourteenth Century: Return to the Qur'an

The return to the Qur'an is the title given by the Muslim vigilantes and reformists and heralded a return to the glory of the past and compensation for backwardness in

this century: a return to the only revelational and undistorted book accepted by all Muslims. Worldviews, beliefs, values and valid precepts could be obtained from this book to fight superstition and rhetorical exaggeration since it is accepted by all that it has been the basis for knowledge, unity, and social as well as political movements amongst Muslims. It could create cultural and social benefits and prevent distorted beliefs falsely attributed to religion as well as misunderstandings.

A tendency towards science, rationality, social thought, approximation of religions, and a battle against superstition and blind prejudices, negligence, leniency and violence are among the important achievements of this movement. Although it was not directly outspoken it led to the gradual rise in importance of interpretation so that it became an indispensable means of Qur'anic exegesis at the end of this century and the contemporary era. Obvious instances include Seyyed Maḥmūd Tāliqāni's interpretative work *Partovi az Qur'an (A Ray of the Qur'an)*, *Tafsīr Al-Mizān* by Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabātabā'i, *Ashnā 'i bā Qur'an (An Introduction to the Qur'an)* by Mortazā Motaḥhari, *Tafsīr Namūna (Model Interpretation)* by Nāsir Makārim and *Tafsīr 'Ameli*.⁷⁹

Another characteristic of the interpretation of the 14th century is the tendency towards scientific interpretation. This allowed scientific issues to be discussed on the creation of the universe, man, the sun and moon, the stars and their movements together with other scientific topics in line with modern theories.⁸⁰ This movement began in the late thirteenth /early fourteenth century A.H. when someone like Iskandarāni incorporated this into his work *Kashf Al-Asrār Al-Nūrāniā (Discovery of the Bright Secrets)*. From that time scientific interpretation, in its new and widespread sense, became very orderly and was introduced in various Qur'anic topics. One of the obvious instances in Sunni interpretations is the work of *Al-Javāhir* from al-Tantāwī.⁸¹ Therefore we can say that the fourteenth century ushers in a return to the Qur'an while various writings in the different fields of scientific, cultural and social interpretation are among its manifestations.

The development of interpretation during this century is doubly important: on the one hand, the interpretation of the predecessors which were still found in libraries gradually got distributed – through the development of the publishing industry. On the other hand, writers and interpreters gave some thought to what interested people

and its accessibility. This was an important point for the interpreters in order to write a book to be widely accessible to people, utilizing different resources and keeping in mind what might appeal to the various addressees.

1.2.15. Fifteenth Century: The Summit of Achievement

The fifteenth century is the apex of the science of interpretation through the history of change in the Shiite world. The important late 14th century work *Al-Mizān* ushered in a turning point in the history of Shiite interpretation. Then change in quantity and quality followed. As the hostile opponents of Shi'ism confess, *Al-Mizān* is one of the best interpretative works ever presented, not only in Shi'ism but throughout the Muslim world.⁸² It promoted interpretation in its jurisprudential and social form. Despite all Shiite interpretation written during the last centuries and published after research and correction, this short period, if we do not call it the epitome of all centuries, at least equals all the other ages.

There have been very important intellectual and cultural changes throughout the developing process of interpretation. Each of these changes reflect the cultural conditions that prevailed at the time. But some changes happened over the fifteenth century that prompted other social and cultural changes and challenged religious sciences.⁸³

One of these changes is that from the personal and otherworldly perspective to the customary law of social perspective. Prior to this, interpreters sought to decipher vague and complex points from a personal view. If they looked for rules and laws of Sharīah in the Qur'an it was merely meant to ask what the responsibility of an individual was, what to think and what to do. But in society at large there was nothing reflected in their relationships. Concepts like freedom, social justice, philosophy of history, the causes of Muslims' backwardness, fighting despotism, degeneration, poverty and social corruption have only entered interpretation recently and have been discussed in relation to relevant verses.⁸⁴

In fact up to the 12th and 13th centuries, the major preference was for the interpreters' reflection of otherworldliness, which governed their work.. But what many Muslims were seeking was a return to the Holy Qur'an and attention to be given to the pressing social issues of the day. In this regard, the movement was after new things,

new thoughts and the expectation of material and social demands such as establishing a religious government and an economic system with social paths mapped out in accordance with religious texts. There are two outstanding principles here: reliance on reason for understanding and the attempt to reconcile Islam with modern criteria for life.

Of course, it is impossible to hide the issue of giving priority to social reform and education and this aspect of the Qur'an has been emphasized over the recent period. Neither could one overlook the comprehensive interpretation of religion.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the science of interpretation in Shi'ism, while interacting culturally with Sunni interpretation on a day to day basis, draws on its intellectual and religious as well as its rational and argumentative identity. There has been an increase in theological exchange and religious dialogues, many of the ideas and beliefs have been refined, while religious conflicts among prejudiced sects have begun to ebb away. Were it not for some fault-finding confrontations of the Wahābis, there would have been grounds for an rapprochement of Islamic parties as one of the desired aims of interpretation.

Another point which cannot be overlooked in the interpretation of this century is the tendency to deal in separate subjects. This attempts to discover and understand the Qur'anic perspective about a subject by observing the common verses with the same meaning as well as their juxtaposition.⁸⁶

Important interpretations by subject were written during this century: *Al-Madkhal elā Tafsīr al-Mūḍīf* (*An Introduction to Interpretation by Subject*) by Muhammad Bāqir Abtaī, *Payām-e Qur'an* (*The Message of the Qur'an*) by Nāsir Makārim, *Ma'ārif-e Qur'an* (*Knowledge of the Qur'an*) by Muhammad Taqī Misbāḥ, *Tafsir-e Mūḍīf* (*Interpretation by Subject*) by Abdullah Javādi Amoli. Other minor individual works of interpretation treated subject wise were also there.

Furthermore, one of the reforms in interpretation of the 15th century concerns the form of the work of exegesis. Like the reform concerning the revival of the texts, research methodology and the Western experience of research, this form too has undergone great change: research is done according to a method, documented, with

references, various indexes and published in elegant form.. The old diction and terms have been replaced by contemporary ones and according to what the reader might appreciate. Every research work requires a special addressee. For a contemporary interpreter the level of understanding of the readers is greatly significant. It is important whether the addressee of the interpretative work is the masses or the educated and from which group or field.⁸⁷

¹Ṭabarsi, Abū 'Alī Faḍl Ibn Hassan , Majma' al-baiān, vol.1, p.31

² Qur'an, 16:89

³ Ibid, 38:29

⁴ Naḥj-ul-Balāghah, article 18

⁵ Ma' refat, Mohammad Hādi, Tafsīr va Mofasserūn, vol.1, p.20

⁶ Ibid, p.19

⁷ Mohammad Hussein, Tabātabā'i, Qur'an dar Islām, p.96

⁸ Strata of Shiite Interpreters:

First stratum: There were those who obtained the interpretative traditions from the Prophet and the Infallible Imams and they registered them in their principles inefficiently and treated their traditions. Zorāra and Muhammad ibn Muslim were Shiite jurists, Marūf, Jarīr and others were very close to the fifth and sixth Imams.

Second stratum: Those who wrote commentaries more elegantly and are among the first group of Shiite authors in interpretation: Forāt ibn Ibrāhīm Kūfī, Abū'ū Ḥamza Thomālī, Aīāshī, Ali ibn Ibrāhīm Qumī, and so on.

The method of this stratum, like that of the fourth stratum of Sunni interpreters, was to use the memorable traditions obtained from the first stratum in their own works with documentation. They hesitated to give their own ideas. As they had access to the infallible Imams, for about three hundred years there was no chronology for these two strata and they used to overlap. Those who included the traditions and omitted the ascription were very few. For instance, Ayyāshī's interpretation is well-known.

One of Ayyāshi's disciples omitted the attribution of traditions briefly from his instructor's work and thus the disciple's version replaced the original one.

Third stratum: This one includes the masters of miscellaneous sciences. Seyyed Razi in literary interpretation, Sheikh Tūsi in theological interpretation (called *Al-Tibīān*), Sadr Al-Muteallihīn shirāzi in his philosophical interpretation such as *Asrār al-Aīāt*, Meibodi and Gonābādi in their mystical interpretations, Sheikh Abd Ali Howeizi in *Nūr Al-Thaqalain*, Seyyed Ḥāshim Bahrāni in *Tafsir-e Burḥān* and Faiz Kāshāni in *Sāfi*; these interpretations are traditional and narrative.

Tehrāni,⁹ Āqa Bozorg-i-, *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 317.

¹⁰ Mosnad Imāmī 'Alī, vol. 1, p. 220, vol. 2, p. 323-9.

¹¹ Majlisi, *Bahār al-Anwār* vol. 89, p. 40 and Muhammad Hadi Ma'refat, *al-Tamhid fi olūm al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, p. 292.

¹² *Baḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 89, p. 41.

¹³ Siūti, *Al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 412.

¹⁴ Ibn Atiyah, *Al-Muharrer al-Wajeez*, vol. 1, p. 41.

¹⁵ *Al-Itqān*, vol. 2, p. 412.

¹⁶ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p. 25-30.

¹⁷ Zarkashī, *Al-borḥān*, vol. 2, p. 157.

¹⁸ *Tafsīr va Mofassirūn*, vol. 1, p. 249.

¹⁹ *Al-dharī'a*, vol. 4, p. 317.

²⁰ *Al-Etqān*, vol. 4, p. 241.

²¹ *Encyclopedia of Shi'ism*, vol. 4, p. 369 (an essay by Shahidi).

²² *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 282.

²³ *Encyclopedia of Shi'ism*, vol. 4, p. 319.

²⁴ Recently, an interpretation attributed to Abū Ḥamzah Thumālī entitled *Tafsir Abū Ḥamza Al-Thumālī* has been published which is the sum of his own interpretative narrations. Its features include the great attention paid to the reasons for the descent of the revelations, an endeavour to mention the virtues of the Household and the utilization of interpretative methods.

Harz ud-Din, Abdul Razzaq, Tafsir Abū Ḥamza Al-Thumālī

²⁵ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p. 36-7

²⁶ Ibn Nadeem, *Al-Fihrist*, p. 36.

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- ²⁷ Al-dharīʿa, vol. 4, p. 239.
- ²⁸ Ibid, pp. 251, 252, 269.
- ²⁹ Ibn Nadeem, Al-Fiḥrist, p. 36.
- ³⁰ Qāzizādeḥ, Kāzim, Magazine of Bayenāt, No. 8, p. 106.
- ³¹ Najjāshi, rijāl Najjāshi, p. 446.
- ³² Tehrāni, Aqā Bozorg. *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 234.
- ³³ Ibn Nadeem, *Al-Fiḥrist*, p. 276.
- ³⁴ *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 348.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 270.
- ³⁶ A research by Sayyed Muhammad Rezā Husseini Jalāli, *Tafsir al- Ḥibri*, “The Researcher’s Introduction,” p. 46.
- ³⁷ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p. 41-3.
- ³⁸ Ali Davāni, Articles presented in the International Congress of the Millennium of Sheikh Tūsi, No. 63, p. 4.
- ³⁹ *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 300.
- ⁴⁰ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p. 45-7.
- ⁴¹ Muhammad Rezaā Ḥakimi, *Khorūsh-i Dejla (The Tumult of Tigris)*, p. 11.
- ⁴² *Tāriḫ Adab Al-Loghat Al-Arabiyah (History of Arabic Language)*, vol. 2, p. 17.
- ⁴³ Aqā Bozorg Tehrāni, *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 252.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 260.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 310.
- ⁴⁶ Sayyed Mohammad Ali, Ayāzi, Sayr-i Tatavur Tafāsī –i Shiʿa, p. 59
- ⁴⁷ The Sūrrah of “The Bee,” verse 44.
- ⁴⁸ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, vol. 3, p. 17; vol. 5, pp. 182, 189 and vol. 4, pp. 367, 371
- ⁴⁹ Aīāzi, Seyyed Muhammad Ali, *Al-Mofasserūn: (Their Lives and their Approaches)*, p. 81.
- ⁵⁰ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p. 64-7.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, p. 75.
- ⁵² Ibn Tāwūs, *Sa’d Al-So’ūd*, p. 247.
- ⁵³ Tehrāni, *Al-Thariah*, vol. 4, p. 252.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 244.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.

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- ⁵⁶ The Magazine of Mīrāth –i Jāvidān, No.102.
- ⁵⁷ Ḥājī Khalifah, *Kashf Al-Thonūn*, vol. 1, pp.186-193.
- ⁵⁸ Sayyed Muhammad Ali Ayāzi, *Understanding the Letter of Interpretations*, p.174.
- ⁵⁹ *Tafsir Jalā' Al-Athḥān*, vol.1, Introduction by Arnavi.
- ⁶⁰ *Saer tatavor Tafaseei Shiah*, Ayazi, Sayyed Mohammad Ali, P. 82
- ⁶¹ Ibid, p. 85.
- ⁶² Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.86-7.
- ⁶³ Muhammad Ali Ḥā'eri, *Fiqh Al- Qur'an fi Al-Turāth Al-Shi'i*, Articles presented to the Congress of Moḥaqqiq Ardabīli, vol.1, p.734.
- ⁶⁴ Teḥrāni, Aqā Bozorg, *Al-Thariah*, vol.4, p.257.
- ⁶⁵ Al- dharī'a, vol.26, p.218 and vol.23, p.223.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, vol.1, p.43 and Aṭān Al-Shia, vol.9, p.159.
- ⁶⁷ Rasūl Jāfariān, *Religion and Politics in the Safavid Period*, p.225.
- ⁶⁸ *Al-Thariah*, vol.1, p.44.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., vol.4, p.342.
- ⁷⁰ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.101-3.
- ⁷¹ The words, actions and the tacit approval of the prophet.
- ⁷² Mortazā Motaḥari, *A Collection of Essays*, "The Principe of Ijtihād in Islam," p.58.
- ⁷³ Tafsīr va Mofasserūn, vol.2 p.214.
- ⁷⁴ *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.112-14.
- ⁷⁵ Motaḥari, Mortazā, *Āshnāyī Bā 'Olūm Islāmi*, p.22.
- ⁷⁶ *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.123-24.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, p.123-124.
- ⁷⁸ Tafsīr va Mofasserān, vol.2, P,449, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.124.
- ⁷⁹ Ayazi, Sayyed Muhammad Ali, *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.131-2.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, P.452-3.
- ⁸¹ Ibid, p.477.
- ⁸² Abd Al-Raḥmān Fahd Al-Rūmi, *Ittijāḥāt Al-Tafsir fi Al-Qarn Al-Rābi' Ashar (Orientations of Interpretation in the Fourteenth Century)*, vol.1, p.249.
- ⁸³ *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.156-7.
- ⁸⁴ Sayyed Mohammad Ali Ayāzi, *Qur'an va Tafsīr –i 'Aṣri*,

⁸⁵ Alavi Meār, Hossein, *Raveshhā Va Gerāyishhāy –i Tafsīri* , p. 343.

⁸⁶ Qadr, Mohammad Bāqir, *Al- Madrasa-a^l Al-Qurāniyya*, p.18.

⁸⁷ *Saire Tatavvore Tafasire Shiah*, p.158-9.

Chapter Two: Verbal meaning and it's distinction with significance

2.1. Introduction

Eric D Hirsch, the American thinker, was born in 1928. He hardly advocates objectivism in the interpretation of text and emphasizes the possibility of objective understanding of text as well as the necessity of achieving a valid understanding and the existence of criteria to distinguish valid from invalid interpretation. In this way, his viewpoint is opposite to those who believe in subjectivism in the interpretation of text.

Hirsch placed himself in a critical position against the inclination of the majority of scholars in the arena of Hermeneutics and literary criticism in the 20th century. That is why the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, the American literary critics of the recent school, radical historicism and all of the perspectives that advocate subjectivism have been analyzed in his works.

Hirsch has compiled two books in respect of hermeneutics. His most famous and important work is *The validity in interpretation* which was published in 1964. As Richard. E. Palmer remarks apparently, what had been published before this book, were mostly dispersed articles or books in German.¹

Hirsch has another book entitled *The aims of interpretation*, published in 1976. It is necessary to mention that the most important ideas of Hirsch were recorded in his first book. Therefore, his second book was compiled in order to explain and complete the reflections that surfaced eight years previously. As a general rule, Hirsch inclines to romantic hermeneutics, although his particular brand of hermeneutics enjoy a particularly rich wealth and come up with great new points.

Hirsch confesses that the main theory of Wilhelm Dilthey is acceptable and also the epistemology and linguistics of Saussure can be deductive pillars for the hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey²

Unlike Dilthey who thinks about human science as a whole, Hirsch confined his reflections to understanding and interpretation of text. Harmony of Hirsch with Romantic hermeneutics in objectivism, it does not mean that he follows Schleiermacher and Dilthey in all subjects concerning text. He has a special idea when defining "verbal meaning", and the quality of the role of the intention of an author to determine the meaning of text which is different from Romantic hermeneutics. Hirsch discusses new and elegant subjects regarding textual hermeneutics, the more important being as follows:

"verbal meaning " and its determination, distinction of verbal meaning from psychology and psychical process author's mind, distinction between verbal meaning with significance, difference of understanding of text from interpretation, criticism and judgment about that, analyzing validity of interpretation in accordance with most probability, confirmation of the reliable interpretation through evidences, constancy and unchangeable verbal meaning and changeable of interpretation, criticism and judgment regarding the text.

The intention of the author plays an important role in the Hirsch theory of hermeneutics since he makes connections between textual meaning and its constancy and determination as well as the possibility of attaining an objective interpretation of text, with the intention of the author. He believes the verbal meaning is related to an author's intention not words. For words have no meaning unless someone intends or understands something from them.³

Hirsch attempts to connect verbal meaning with the intention and awareness of an author but verbal meaning is fixed and unchangeable, since the author had a particular intention through creating the words. If verbal meaning had connected with the awareness of the interpreter, instead of the intention of the author, the verbal meaning would have changed. According to this perspective regarding "verbal meaning" the way is paved to reinforce the possibility of objective interpretation. Because objective and valid interpretation of text is only a perception of its verbal meaning ; that is to say, the meaning is related to the intention of the author and basically this meaning is distinguished and fixed. Hirsch considers his hermeneutics within the category of general hermeneutics theory. It should be mentioned that he is not going to present a general methodology for understanding absolute text. For, in

his opinion, meaning of text and what an author has intended is not accessible through method as well as general rules; he believes that the process of understanding at the beginning is a kind of guesswork which will either be correct or not. We do not need to employ guesswork. The methodical activity in the process of interpretation only when is appeared that we want to assess and analyze the guess. He asserts that general methodology in the process of the understanding of a text has no place:

The notion that a reliable methodology of interpretation can be built upon a set of canons is thus a mirage. ⁴

According to Hirsch we cannot be presented with a general methodology to interpret and understand text. But it is possible to find general principles ruling over the understanding of text. General hermeneutics is to expurgate these principles and Hirsch's purpose in the validity of interpretation is inclined to this subject. He emphasized validity because in accordance with his idea, this important subject has been neglected in recent years.⁵

In the introduction to his book, *The validity in interpretation*, Hirsch was influenced in his hermeneutical reflection by some scientific personalities including Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, Schleiermacher, Ferdinand de Saussure, Hans Reichenbach, John Maynard Keynes and Karl Popper.⁶

Undoubtedly, as there exist various ways of thinking in Hirsch's reflection, he does not mean to harmonize his hermeneutics with them completely. For his interpretive theory is unique and matchless, although it has something in common with classical and Romantic hermeneutics in some particulars.

2.2. "Verbal meaning" of the text

All hermeneutics schools hold that the goal of interpretation and understanding of text is to get its meaning. But the main question which is disputable among them is has the text semantical autonomy or not?

The aim of semantical autonomy is that a text is composed from a number of words, while the awareness and intention of the author has no contribution in creating its

meaning. He only plays a role in combining the words and also creating the text. There is no further need for an author. Because meaning belongs to the text not the author. It should be separated from both author and reader. Therefore the intention of author and reader does not affect the establishment of the meaning. Rather text enjoys semantical autonomy. Semantical autonomy means the interpretation of text is to perceive what it says not what the author intended from the words.

Philosophical hermeneutics, Structuralism, the American new literature of critical thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur, all believe in semantical autonomy as a whole. In spite of some existing differences, all of them have accepted that.

Hirsch believes that meaning independence of text is not acceptable. Since the meaning of a text is an intentional thing. That is, text presents the intention of one who has created it. This person could be the author or reader of the text. So, text can not be understood without an author giving attention to intention and awareness. Those who emphasise independence of meaning of a text from an author, have no choice but to expect to replace the interpreter in the role of author. For if they also ignore the intention of the interpreter, the text would be meaningless. It is evident, that the text would have meaning if the author intends a meaning of that, or a reader understands something from that:

A word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it. There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness. Whenever meaning is connected to words, a person is making the connection, and the particular meanings he lends to them are never the only legitimate ones under the norms and conventions of his language.⁷

Hirsch believes the firmness and structure of a text meaning depends on the intention of the author, while taking account of the awareness of the interpreter in the reconstruction of the meaning of a text. In this way, there is no role for an interpreter to create text meaning.

Attempt to create a connection between text meaning and an author's intention will be reveal some important conclusions:

1. Meaning of text is a distinguished and specified thing. Since diversity and plurality have no place in the intention of an author. The author has a special intention and definitely intended a specified meaning from the words of a text. If one wants to regard a contribution for the intention of the interpreter to create text meanings, it leads to Pluralism necessarily. This point is what Hirsch abstains from strongly.

2. Determination of meaning paves the way to enter discussions on validity in interpretation. There will be a criterion for assessing valid interpretations among numerous interpretations of text through the relationship between meaning and the intention of the author. Hence those interpretations that are in harmony with the real meaning which has been intended by the author is called valid interpretation.

3. This relationship between text meaning and the author's intention shows that the meaning of text is not changeable, since meaning is a historical event which has been intended by the author in a specified time and according to his awareness that it has been realized. The meaning of text will determinate with an author's intention. That is why it does not change by any means. Hirsch refers in the first appendix to *Validity in interpretation* that he is indebted to Edmund Husserl for the theory of "intentionality of meaning". Edmund Husserl in his book entitled *Logische Untersuchungen* tries to prove objectivity of meaning with the help of analyzing the visible relationship between meaning and mental processes that make its realization. He shows that meaning is an intentional object. So, that is a fixed thing and can be subject to various attentions and awareness. As you can look at a box from various angles and even remember that repeatedly later. In all this looking and remembering we are employing different mental activities. However their subjects will be steady and determined.

Edmund Husserl names the link between the act of awareness and its subject as intentional. He thinks that there are at least 3 aspects to an object (e.g. a desk) when we direct our attention towards it. Our perception deals with the first aspect of the object which is called 'intentional subject'. The second aspect is the action by which we perceive the subject and is called 'intentional act'. The third aspect which is independent of our perception act, deals with the physical entity which makes sense of that object.

The noticeable point in Edmund Husserl's thinking is the word 'Meaning' which is a common expression for all intentional subjects and the verbal meaning is an exceptional branch of the intentional subject and like other intentional subjects is constant and consistent. The 'Verbal meaning' is the aspect of the speaker's attention which is open to other incorporations, based on the language conventions and arrangements.

Consequently, he believes verbal meaning is steady and intentional reproduction by other people can be possible. Once meaning determinates the intention of the speaker, this historical thing can be reproduced repeatedly with the attention and intention of other persons.⁸

Meaning exists in the conscious situation and consciousness belongs to something, that is to say, it depends on meaning. Verbal and text meaning are attached to the consciousness of the author or speaker not the interpreter in according to Hirsch. He criticizes the psychological conception of the meaning. For they believe text meaning is related to the interpreter's consciousness and his mental activities when confrontating the text. Namely what he thinks is the subject pertaining to his consciousness forms the meaning of the text.

Hirsch believes that they are sophisticated in this perspective. Since when we look at a box sometimes we are unaware of its mediation of mental picture and imagine it will be external reality while mental picture belongs to our consciousness and exactly defer to outer reality of the box. It is necessary to note such that the box is an external subject, the meaning of the text that belongs to consciousness of the author is also an intentional subject. What is the pertaining of interpreter's consciousness will be a mental rebuilding of the subject not the exact subject itself. Just as it can be possible to have various imaginations of external object and many people could look at this, intentional subject, like the meaning of text can also be pertaining of consciousness for unlimited readers.

What is the source of sophistication of the psychological analysis of meaning is to unite text meaning with the interpreter's response to it. Whatever passes in the mind of interpreters regarding the text, will be his or her answer and reaction to the

`meaning of the text' and this meaning is related to the consciousness of the author. Basically a steady meaning is able to be intended by various individuals.⁹

Psychological meaning theory can be conformed on mentality of the author, that is, he imagines his reaction and subsequent intention as a meaning of text, while it will be related to his first intention. It is obvious that reviewing the text meaning is different with first meaning which has been intended by author. Taking a look at the text at various times could not change the identity of the meaning of that text. The meaning of the text should not be mingled with experiences that contain meaning. The author can have different experiences of meaning concerning the text that he has intended himself. For instance, he is sometimes happy with his written text and is unhappy another time, in a way, rejects it completely. In all these situations the meaning of the text has not changed, rather the consciousness of the author and his mental view have changed. This matter 'as it was mentioned above' is related to a review by the author not the identity of the text meaning. Because of his perspective in relation to the meaning of text, Hirsch sets himself against the theory of historical meaning, that says the meaning of the text has a special determination in any time. In this way, no longer can the text be expressed precisely, as a steady and unchangeable meanings since text meaning is historic and will be changed at various times.

Hirsch has two objections to this theory: first, according to this idea, changing meaning is not related to lingual acts and second, this reflection does not give us a criterion to evaluate valid interpretation.

If the identity of meaning changes over time, then there will never be a way to find the true Cinderella (metaphor of true meaning of text) among all the contenders. So, the meaning of the text is unchangeable although different interpretations can be made at various times. As he asserts:

I say that a verbal meaning is determinate I mean that it is an entity which is self-identical. Furthermore, I also mean that it is an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next—that it is changeless.¹⁰

According to Hirsch's analysis regarding 'verbal meaning', basically 'context' has no contribution to determinate the text meaning, rather only play a role in the understanding and interpretation of the text. Identity of meaning of the text is attached to consciousness and the intention of author, while context of meaning has no share in his will and determination.

Perception of 'context' and the position of the creation of a text is more useful for the interpreter than anything else due to impression of his guesswork in respect of text meaning. When the interpreter conceives the context of meaning, it will unlock a limited circle of probabilities for him and somehow prevent the interpreter from certain guesses as to meaning. Hence what is related to interpretation should never be mixed with factors of determination of the text meaning. Determination of the text meaning depends on the will and intention of an author; not context of meaning. 'Verbal meaning' can be limited to lingual possibilities while the intention of an author determinates particular verbal meaning among limited lingual possibilities.

Hirsch does not believe in the idea that authors can infer whatever they want but they are mostly limited by the words they choose which would represent a particular meaning according to the linguistic agreements of their culture.¹¹ Hirsch's primary definition of the verbal concept is as follows: Whatever the person wants to convey can be done by the use of particular chains of linguistic signs and things which could be conveyed through these linguistic signs.¹²

This primary definition of the verbal concept should become explicit as regards the meanings of which the author was not conscious, but anyway a part of the correct interpretation is supposed to be his intention, so that it would include these meanings as well. Thus Hirsch asserts that the meaning of the author could include other meanings besides his or her intended meaning; because the intentional concept of the author determined a particular kind of meaning which is in contrast to a particular mental concept. Therefore, for example, if I say that nothing could make me happy like the third symphony of Beethoven, my intention would be that there would be nothing of an artistic nature which could make me as happy as the third symphony could. Here I have excluded pleasures like swimming from this statement or have removed it from the scope of my interpretation. However, I have included some other artistic pleasures I am not aware of.¹³ Thus the verbal concept is a type of the willed

meaning. This concept prevents the interpreter from any reading or interpretation and also leads the interpreter to some meaning beyond the particular one intended by the author.

Verbal meaning can be defined as follows:

It can be understood by another willed type which an author expresses by linguistic symbols and which through those symbols. ¹⁴

With 'Type' its determination relies on the will and consciousness of an author: whatever he intended, it will be the determinate meaning of the text. 'Type' is an entity with two characteristics: first, it has limits and boundaries that concern some things but not others.. For instance, every 'Type' is accompanied by essentials of special meanings. The second decisive characteristic of a 'Type' is that it can be expressed in various ways and methods, that is, content could be declared through many expressions and lingual models.

Verbal meaning, in fact, is a kind of 'Type'. Hence it has particular meaning essentials, and is shareable since it may be asserted through different ways and verbal meaning can be the object of consciousness of many individuals. So, in order to determinate meaning for others it must be the model of 'Type'. In this way 'verbal meaning' will be a willed type by the author. ¹⁵

As I have mentioned before, according to Hirsch , that meaning is based on the intention and consciousness of the author. Now we can ask a question: does the author intend all components and dependants of verbal meaning? If verbal meaning is a kind of "Type", then does the meaning and all of its essentials rely on intention and consciousness to detail? Hirsch confesses that sometimes an author does not have a comprehensive relationship with certain aspects and the essential meaning of the text. Nevertheless, in his opinion, this point does not present any particular problem for being "verbal meaning" as a sort of consciousness and intentional thing. Because he asserts that meaning is "as a whole" related to intention and components which have been neglected will be among the whole meaning. It is the interpreter's duty to discover the "Type" of the author's intention when he is interpreting a text. He should classify the content of the text in the model of "Type" or "genre". In this case, all of the essentials of the meaning concerning the "Type" will be components

of text meaning although the author had no comprehensive awareness of some of them.¹⁶

2.3. The distinction between Verbal Meaning and Significance

It can be seen in Hirsch's works that he has differentiated between the two sorts of meanings. Verbal meaning that occasionally he expresses as "Meaning" is apart from something entitled "Significance". Perceiving this statement and Hirsch's precise understanding of the word "Significance" is the key to understanding his hermeneutics. Hirsch states at the beginning book of *The aims of interpretation* that the basic axis of his previous book (*Validity in interpretation*) was Meaning and its relationship to valid interpretation, while the main axis of his second book (*The aims of interpretation*) from the beginning was Significance and its relation to literary assessment.¹⁷

As has been mentioned before, meaning or verbal meaning can be distinguished from the consciousness and intention of the author. Hirsch defines Meaning and Significance thus:

In the present book, unless otherwise specified, the term "meaning" refers to the whole verbal meaning of text, and "significance" to textual meaning in relation to a larger context, i.e., another mind, another era, a wider subject matter, an alien system of values, and so on. In other words, "significance" is textual meaning as related to some context, indeed any context, beyond itself.¹⁸

When we analyze text meaning or present a question on the text as well as conform the text in particular circumstances, in fact we are not seeking the verbal meaning, rather dealing with "significance". For example, once we regard a text as either very interesting and desirable or as tedious, even if our perspective and assessment have been changed at different times, the verbal meaning will be fixed. As a matter of fact, what has changed is the relationship between the text meaning and the interpreter.

How the interpreter views the text, interesting or not, according to Hirsch is "significance". Even if the author wishes to review his text repeatedly and present various interpretations, such as T. S. Eliot does, it does not mean there is an absence

of distinguished "verbal meaning" or any lack of intention on the part of the author to determinate the verbal meaning, rather that "verbal meaning" was created by a writer like Eliot with intention when he was compiling the text. Basically the meaning is steady and unchangeable. It is evident that what has been changed is the reaction of Eliot before "verbal meaning". This assessment will bring changeable results which can be termed "significance".¹⁹

Verbal meaning is related to what is contained in the text and the consciousness of the author. However, significance always belongs to what is outside the text. Wherever significance is raised at the same time, the link and relationship between "verbal meaning" and what is outside will be considered. Whenever we are thinking of the verbal meaning of text in comparison with external conditions, in fact we will be confronting the significance. As Hirsch expresses it:

The difference between these tiny prepositions is highly important and too often ignored. Significance is always "meaning-to," never "meaning-in." Significance always entails a relationship between what is in a man's verbal meaning and what is outside it, even when that relationship pertains to the author himself or to his subject matter.²⁰

Hirsch draws the very results from the theory of separation between "verbal meaning" and "significance". The constancy of 'verbal meaning' and the changeability of significance is a suitable foundation for the possibility of validity as well as an objective interpretation that Hirsch has made use of properly. He attributes the separation between two kinds of meaning to Frege, who proves in a article that it is possible that two meanings of a text could be different from each while their referents or truth-values are alike. Hirsch asserts:

The distinction between the meaning and the significance of a text was first clearly made by Frege in his article 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung,' where he demonstrated that although the meanings of two texts may be different, their referent or truth-value may be identical.²¹

It should not be forgotten that Frege only referred to instances where 'meaning' (sinn) is different and 'meaning-to' (bedeutung) is identical. Whereas the opposite side of the proposition is also possible, i.e., the 'meaning' is steady but 'meaning-to'

is different during the passage of time. In other words, the meaning of the proposition could be fixed but its relationship has changed. It is necessary to mention that Husserl also accepted the aforesaid separation between two sorts of meaning and made a distinction between the inner and outer horizons of any meaning. (Ibid)

2.4. The four Functions of a text according to Hirsch

Hirsch differentiates between the functions of a text and believes they should not be mixed. The main factor of numerous mistakes and sophistications is blending them without paying attention to any of their separate goals. So they have to be separated from each other because of their different purposes. So Hirsch named them as Understanding, Interpretation, Judgement and Criticism. It is necessary to note that separating these four functions of a text does not mean they have formed no impression on each other. Many modern Hermeneutical schools assess any confrontation with text within the framework of understanding or interpretation of text by ignoring these functions. Hence they committed many errors and neglected any sophistication in this respect.²² For instance, we can refer to Gadamer, who considers understanding, interpretation, comparing and application as components of the process of understanding a text.²³

It is a first and necessary act for Hirsch to separate the four functions of a text and assess their application in detail. Although some scientific personalities before him referred to this separation, such as Ernesti who separated the art of 'understanding' from that of explanation and warns of the potential mistake to combine these two functions as one unit of 'interpretation'. As a matter of fact understanding of a text is a priority for its interpretation for others. Two interpreters can achieve a common understanding of a text; nevertheless they can choose various methods for interpreting and transferring that meaning to others.²⁴

On the basis of Hirsch's perspective, any literary text has a meaning and a significance, or application in the sense that understanding and interpretation apply to the meaning while the other functions, i.e. judgement and criticism, use significance. In other words, the subject of the first two functions is "meaning" and of the last two functions is "significance".

Hirsch applies the word “understanding” for ‘understanding skill’ as well as the word “interpretation” for ‘descriptive skill’. Therefore, meaning is the subject of both understanding and descriptive skills. For Hirsch the meaning is the same meaning of words and sentences of the text that was intended by the author:

whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed by means of those linguistic signs.²⁵

The main difference between “understanding” skill and “descriptive skill” is to establish the meaning of a text by the interpreter through the text itself. The goal of the interpreter in ‘understanding skill’ is to know the text meaning based on the expressions and words as well as contexts of the text itself. After achieving an understanding and also finding the meaning of words, which are the intentions of author or speaker, by the interpreter if he wants to explain or describe what has been understood and found out, basically will be exited from area of “understanding” and entered in interpretation realm.

The interpreter, in the stage of interpretation, makes use of many more expressions as well as words and does not limit himself to existing terms and words in the text. He is seeking to express his understanding of the text for other persons through their language, although he would inevitably add some words that do not exist in the text. For this reason, Hirsch believes that when someone writes his opinion of what has understood from the text, is considered as an interpretation not an understanding. Since on the basis of his perspective, “understanding” is always found through the words of a text, but interpretation and explanation could be created by the words of the interpreter.

In the stage of ‘descriptive skill’, difference of interpretation will happen however understanding of text meaning is identical before all. All interpreters in one manner and form achieve the intention of the author as well as the final meaning of the text and their only difference will be in their descriptive skill. Also interpreters not wishing to limit themselves to the terms of the text, use other words, hence they differ from each other when they want to explain their understanding of text. It is

very interesting to mention that even these interpretations, according to Hirsch, are not necessarily incompatible with each other.

For they can be said to presuppose a common understanding of the text. While the explanation of this understanding may cause interpreters to express themselves differently, basically they must be talking about the same thing: the understanding of the text in its own terms. There can be only one correct understanding, therefore, otherwise the text has not, in fact, been understood in its own terms but in some other way.²⁶

In other words, according to Hirsch it is possible for different individuals to reach an identical understanding but each person can present a special interpretation of a text, that is, a difference in interpretation does not necessarily signify that there is a difference between understandings.

For instance, it is possible that one person can declare his understanding of a text by using an ethical expression and the another person expresses the same understanding in the form of legal and jurisprudential terms or perhaps someone else interprets the understanding by utilizing philosophical words or Gnostic terms. According to Hirsch basically what is said or written will constantly be a kind of interpretation. Therefore, in the event that we state concerning the meaning of a text, it would be an interpretation which was expressed by the interpreter, not their understanding, since the understanding belongs to oneself and one's thoughts. First of all, one understands something (whether correct or not), afterwards, the understanding is expressed in the form of writing or teaching for others.

So, what is made to appear will be interpretation, not understanding itself. In other words, it can be said 'understanding' becomes apparent as 'interpretation' when you are going to transfer it to others. Hirsch adds another point in regard to separate understanding from interpretation, that we first understand and then we interpret.²⁷ This is important when we come to Gadamer's point of view, that says any understanding is a kind of interpretation. On the basis of Hirsch's ideas, one who understood the text and achieved the intention of the author will not be able to interpret the understanding, without taking the following into consideration:

1-Capability of reproduction

2-Capability of designation

Capability of reproduction is the special feature when the meaning of words is interpreted and if the meaning is not able to be reproduced then its understanding and interpretation will not occur at all. Capability of designation is the particular feature whose existence is inevitable for reproduction of meaning. As a matter of fact, capability of designation is an essential attribute for any shareable meanings since there will be neither a boundary nor a fixed essence for an indefinite meaning. In this case the meaning cannot conform to the meaning in the mind of the other person.²⁸

It is necessary to note the second feature for it does not necessarily follow that the meaning should be very precise and minute. Because in Hirsch's Hermeneutics the meaning could be determined and at the same time be ambiguous. In fact determination of meaning is the precondition of the first feature of meaning, i.e. reproduction. Nobody would be able to reproduce the meaning of a text and also perceive the intention of the author in the text meaning. Therefore, on the one hand reproduction of meaning is possible in the event that you could imagine its capability of designation. On the other hand capability of designation of meaning is possible, if the meaning could be capable of reproduction. As Hirsch himself stipulated above that determinacy is a necessary attribute of any sharable meaning, since indeterminacy cannot be shared.²⁹

One can say, according to Hirsch, these two features mentioned on meaning are interdependent and cannot be separated from each other. In other words on the basis of Hirsch's ideology, in order to interpret a text, the meaning must have two features: first is its capability of reproduction, that is, it can be reproduced in such a way that the reader will be able to produce the same meaning the creator of the text intended, and finally that it can be understood. Such a feature prepares the possibility for sharing its meaning. The second is the capability of designation, that is, the meaning of the text is a fixed thing with fixed bounds. Basically if the meaning does not have a communal phenomenon we cannot understand it. So in this event the author has already intended a meaning that is not conceivable to us, therefore we are not able to find out his intention and if the meaning is not determined then how can we share in it? What things do these two people, the author and the reader, want to share with

each other? In this way, the communal attribute and capability of reproduction of the meaning necessitates the meaning to be determined.

Hirsch in contrast to Gadamer - who regards the meaning relating to the particular mentality of the interpreter and will be changeable during the process of tradition - considers the meaning of the text to be the same intention of the author, that is steady and determined while it is transferable to another. It is necessary to remember that the relationship between determination of meaning and capability of its reproduction (according to logic) is “*equality*” that is to say; every determined meaning has the capability to be reproduced and also every meaning has capability to be reproduced will be determinate. Of course the relationship between the determination of meaning and the present reproduction of meaning is “*absolute universal and particular*” since what was reproduced had been a definitely determined thing,. However it is possible for the meaning to be fixed and determined but it cannot be reproduced and transferred to the reader’s mind. For example, with unfamiliar and complicated perceptions as well as special terms of certain sciences which are not easy to understand to all.

Hirsch uses an expression called *Intrinsic Genre*. He claims that every sentence has an *Intrinsic Genre* which remains unchangeable regardless of any changes in words and their combinations. He believes the concept and the idea behind the sentence is the *Intrinsic Genre*.³⁰ In other words, the fixed meaning and the determined meaning and re-productivity that are intended by the author are the *Intrinsic Genre* of the sentence. This *Intrinsic Genre* is the criteria of the text meaning and is also the validity of the interpretation.

According to Hirsch, blending the understanding and explanatory skills or unity of understanding and interpretation in the Hermeneutics of Gadamer has raised a challenge for him, which is not an easy obstacle to overcome because Gadamer believes that understanding and interpretation are historical issues. So he finds it difficult to segregate the two understanding and explanatory skills:

Attempting to efface this distinction results only in logical embarrassment before the simplest questions, such as what does the explicator understand before he makes his explication? Gadamer’s difficulty in coping with this basic question is quite apparent when he

comes to describe the process of interpretation. He can not say that the interpreter understands the original sense of the text, since that would be to disregard the historicity of understanding. He can not say, on the other hand, that the interpreter understands his own subsequent explication, since that would be patently absurd.³¹

In Hirsch Hermeneutics, a text has also implication (significance) in addition to its meaning which has understanding and interpretation. According to Palmer a text has verbal meaning and significance. For him verbal meaning is the meaning which is accessed by the absolute verbal analysis and the significance is what we understand of today's meaning. By using Betti's words in this regard we can also say:

The *Bedeutung* (Meaning) must be held separate from *Bedeutsamkeit* (Significance) or philology will fall apart and the possibility of obtaining objective and valid results will vanish. Upon this distinction rests the integrity of philology and the possibility of objectivity.³²

In Hirsch's mind Hermeneutics was only limited to a text's verbal meaning and the connotation; according to some others, Significance and application is outside Hirsch's Hermeneutics arena. As a result, out of the four functions of a text only those functions fall within the Hermeneutics arena that have their subject's verbal meaning, but other functions of the text i.e. Judgment and Criticism will be outside hermeneutics arena.

Now let us consider Hirsch's views in connection with the four Functions of a text:

2.4.1. Text understanding

According to Hirsch anybody who is able to write and speak a language can undoubtedly understand the same oral and written language since the type of meaning that directs writing and speaking, also at the same time directs the understanding act. It was customary in the German tradition to discuss this relationship to understanding. In addition to linguists and philologists, psychologists also had opinions on this and evaluated the psychological process of understanding. On the basis of the Hirsch perspective, psychological discussion of understanding is not important. In other words, it is not important how to understand; but what is important to knowing how to judge and determine the correct and valid meaning.

Hermeneutics for Hirsch is no longer the theory of understanding; but the logic of validation. It is the theory by which it can be said, this is what the author meant to say, not that.³³

Hirsch believes understanding cannot be directly acquired through text, in such a way the reader is the only one who can obtain it, and it is constantly something which has been created by signs. The existence of understanding requires the activity of the reader in creating meaning. As it is evident that if the reader is not acquainted with the language of the text, he cannot understand it. So the understanding could not follow immediately from the text but it needs to be the person behind the text, like the reader, to open up its meaning. It is necessary to note that this statement had been expressed by Emilio Betti before Hirsch. Since he regarded the understanding as the reproduction of the intentional meaning of the author.³⁴ Obviously reproduction needs to the substantial role of the interpreter of the text and it indicates that the understanding of the text is not confined to something without some thought by the reader.

Therefore text and its perception of `verbal meaning` through lingual signs requires the knowledge of rule and method relating to the lingual signs that can be identified as "*linguistic presumption*" to the act of understanding. The verbal meaning can only be understood according to its own proposition. This proposition is not linguistic but rather sometimes returns to the objective and social affairs in relation to the text. Perception of these subjects helps the reader to guess the meaning of the text. Naturally, understanding the text will not be accessible without knowing these propositions, since they are *conventional systems* that the text was based upon and the text meaning intended by the author based on these *convention systems*.

As a result of what has been mentioned it appears mistake of "*Sceptical historicism*".because it has been misunderstood in perception of the text meaning. According to *Sceptical historicism*, a text can be understood based on subjective experiences and today's way of thinking by the reader. As a result, understanding of the text is created on the basis of our own criterion. This idea is wrong because of not being aware that "verbal meaning" should be expressed in its own terms." *Conventional systems*" like horizon and outlook has surrounded the text while "*sceptical historicism*" concentrates on the horizon of meaning and mental

perspective of the text reader. But it is not true, since “verbal meaning” as well as text is also surrounded in its particular perspective. It is the reader’s duty to find out the meaning of the author’s words according to his outlook and the horizon of the meaning of words as well as the speaker. Hence the reader has no right to impose his own interpretation on the text.³⁵

On the other hand, according to Hirsch, “sceptical historicism” changes the acceptable assumption that governing unfamiliar meanings is a difficult and indefinite action to another assumption, that we always have to impose our mental images and strange beliefs on the subject. He never accepts this matter. We either analyze a text according to what we understand of it, rightly or wrongly; or we do not interpret it at all. We do not understand something right from the beginning that is supposed to be interpreted according to its own concepts.³⁶

In other terms, according to Gadamer every understanding is a kind of interpretation and there is nothing called “understanding” versus “interpretation.” While studying a text we start interpreting it in our minds – even before we reproduce it for others. He concludes that difference in interpretations is the result of difference in understandings. However, Hirsch’s emphasis is on the issue that interpretation comes after understanding. If we do not understand a text and realize its meaning we will not be able to use familiar terms to analyze and interpret it. He believes that when others discovered a difference in interpretations and consequently the difficulty of distinguishing between the appropriate and inappropriate ones, they claimed that there is absolutely no fixed criterion for the appropriateness of interpretations and that all of them have the same value and are correct in the relevant conditions. The truth is that we cannot draw this unacceptable conclusion from the difficulty of deciding on the appropriate interpretation.

2.4.2. Interpretation of the text

Hirsch recognizes understanding as the making and interpreting of the verbal meaning of the text. According to Hirsch, there is no relationship between understanding the text and its significance. Therefore, interpretation is nothing but the explanation of the verbal meaning. Hence interpretation is related to both meaning and significance.

David Couzens Hoy writes:

While understanding and interpretation differ in that the former involves the construction of meaning and the latter its explanation, both have as their object the meaning of the text per se. On Hirsch's account a text has not only meaning but also significance (Hirsch uses the German word *Sinn* for the former and *Bedeutung* for the latter). Verbal meaning is what the author meant to say, and the construction of that meaning by the interpreter is called 'understanding'. The explanation of that understanding is interpretation.³⁷

We usually observe that in interpretation some expressions are used that are not present in the original text. Explanation is an art for the introduction of the text in the form of new expressions. Variety and plurality of interpretations are caused by the fact that one never imply a plurality of the meaning of the text. The fixity and sameness of verbal meaning does not prevent the possibility of introducing different interpretations and explanations.

In other words, considering the plurality of the bulk of modern interpretations together with their new methods, Hirsch calls it "the tower of Babel"³⁸ and asserts that despite the passage of time through which the importance of a text and its interpretations change, such a change does not alter the essential and definite meaning of the text. There could be no criterion for the validity and appropriateness of interpretation without this principle.

Two interpreters could possibly present different interpretations of a text even if their understanding of the text is the same. The sources of these differences include matters such as the difference of aims, the difference in "style" aimed at the audience as well as the type of expression. Therefore, "interpretation" could be regarded as historical but the meaning of the text could not be regarded as historical or suspended. That is to say meaning does not change with the passage of time. "The historicity of interpretation" is completely different from "the timelessness" of understanding.

There is no single correct way of explication and interpretation in hermeneutics. Neither is there a specific discourse and style. Therefore, the interpreter has to know what method, discourse and style to use for conveying meaning.

Hirsch favours the view that with passage of time and modifications of intellectual discourses governing people, there is a need to vary and qualify interpretations. He accepts the possibility that meanings are not homogeneous. That is to say, there are different readings, in terms of “verbal meaning,” in the minds of different readers. But he insists that the so- called “historicity of understanding” could not be defended. Change of context demands “historicity of interpretation.” The change requires a variety of interpretation. However, the mere change of context does not ask for variety and plurality since the emphasis and the issues that contribute to the shape of explication and interpretation and require its change are completely different from the emphasis and issues that influence the process of understanding the meaning of text.³⁹

2.4.3. Criticizing and evaluating the text

Hirsch postulates that understanding the text is different from interpreting it and the two differ from criticism. Criticizing and evaluating a text happens only after understanding its verbal meaning. The relationship between the meaning of the text and the values of the outside world is the judge in evaluation. It is the relationship between the meaning of the text and the values and the standards outside the world which is judged and evaluated.

In other words, in Hirsch’s hermeneutics, there are two other functions for every literary text in addition to the two functions of understanding and interpretation: the function of judgment and the function of criticism. According to Hirsch, the subject of the two functions of understanding and interpretation is verbal meaning. However, the subject of the other two functions (that is judgment and criticism) is significance or application. The difference between the last two functions, in Hirsch’s mind, is precisely similar to the difference between understanding and interpretation. Whenever we decide to compare the text to the data outside the text (the context) and talk about compatibility and incompatibility of the text and the data, we arrive in the arena of the function of judgment.

The critical and evaluative interpretation does not stand for the verbal meaning but it is affiliated to “significance;” because the content of criticism and evaluation is not to remediate the verbal meaning but to express its relationship to the outside world, that is to say what it signifies. Hirsch emphasizes that sometimes understanding and criticism as well as interpretation and evaluation converge and the reader not only understands the material but he also evaluates it; while the interpreter evaluates and criticizes it. This blend does not prevent distinctive treatment of the text. What is said about the text should get separated, to distinguish between understanding, interpreting or evaluating the text. According to Hirsch, the neglect of such a distinction has promoted the sceptic and relative attitude on understanding the text. Attention to the distinction has reduced scepticism.⁴⁰

The matter of significance and not that of verbal meaning is not contained in hermeneutics. For instance, criticism and evaluation of the text should be the subject of criticism.⁴¹ It is obvious that the distinction drawn by Hirsch between meaning and significance, on the one hand, and introducing various ways of treating the text, on the other hand, have paved the way for limiting the scope of hermeneutics. Issues such as criticism and textual evaluation, textual responses to the interpreter, interaction between the text and the interpreter’s horizons of meaning, the practical way in the process of understanding and locating the text in the hermeneutic situation and the new conditions of the interpreter are all affiliated to significance and not verbal meaning. Therefore, according to Hirsch, many of the philosophical hermeneutic issues are irrelevant to the mission and goal of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic issues are merely those about realization of verbal meaning, its validity and appropriateness.

Hirsch’s view of hermeneutics and its scope and the distinction it draws between two kinds of meaning causes protest among adherents of philosophical hermeneutics. For example, Richard Palmer criticizes Hirsch, arguing that if hermeneutics is regarded as a mere verbal issue and verbal meaning and its major concern the validation of interpretation and distinguishing between valid and invalid interpretation, it would be very limited,⁴² and equivalent to philology with an appendix of “the logic of validation of understanding.” Thus all issues of the theory of understanding, especially the intricate thoughts of philosophical hermeneutics of the twentieth

century about the epistemology of understanding, the historical understanding, as well as linguistic and phenomenological reforms would not be within the reach of hermeneutics.⁴³

It seems that increasing or decreasing the scope of hermeneutics should not be a major concern. What is emphasized by Hirsch is the fact that many scholars of modern hermeneutics overlook the distinction between significance and meaning. This has led most of them to historicizing understanding, their inclination to relativism in understanding and the impossibility of considering validation in interpretation.

¹Palmer, Richard E, *Hermeneutics*, P. 60.

²Hirsch, Eric D, *validity in interpretation* P. 242.

³Ibid, P. 4.

⁴ Ibid, P. 203.

⁵ Ibid, P. viii.

⁶ Ibid xi.

⁷Ibid, p. 4.

⁸Ibid, pp. 217, 219.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 37, 39.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 45, 46.

¹¹ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer*, op.cit. pp. 43-4.

¹² *Validity in interpretation*. P. 31.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 48-9.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 49.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 50, 51.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 48, 221, 223.

¹⁷ Hirsch, Eric D, *The aims of interpretation*, P. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 2, 3.

¹⁹ *Validity in interpretation*, pp. 7, 20.

²⁰ Ibid, P. 63.

²¹ Ibid, p. 211.

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- ²² Couzens Hoy, David , *The critical circle*, University of California press. 1978, p.15.
- ²³ *Truth and Method*, p.308.
- ²⁴ *Validity in interpretation*, pp. 129,131.
- ²⁵ Ibid, p.31, *the critical circle* P.19.
- ²⁶ *Validity in interpretation*, p.144.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p.134.
- ²⁸ *The validity in interpretation* p. 44.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Couzens Hoy, David, *The Critical circle*, University of California press, 1978, P.20.
- ³¹ *Validity in interpretation*, P.243.
- ³² Palmer, Richard E, *Hermeneutics*, Northwestern University press, 1969, P.60-61.
- ³³ Ibid, P. 46.
- ³⁴ Bleicher, Josef, Routledge and Kegan paul, *Contemporary hermeneutics*, pp.32,33,46.
- ³⁵ Ibid, PP. 134, 135.
- ³⁶ Ibid, p. 135.
- ³⁷ *The critical circle*, p14.
- ³⁸ *Validity in Interpretation*, P. 129.
- ³⁹ Ibid, PP. 136, 138.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, P. 140, 143.
- ⁴¹ Palmer, Richard E, *Hermeneutics* p.62.
- ⁴² Ibid, P. 65.
- ⁴³ Ibid, PP 57, 251.

Chapter Three: Hirsch's View on Validation of Interpretation

3.1. Introduction

The classical theory of hermeneutics (Schleiermacher and Dilthey) considers understanding of a text as the perception of the original and true meaning of that text. There was no doubt in the theory that the text has a definite meaning. According to the classical theory, understanding the text is possible only when a relationship is built between two persons, that is between the author and the reader (or between the artist and the audience). On one side of this relationship there is an artist who speaks and writes (through "writing" the text he speaks and accordingly drawing a tableau or composing a piece of music are kinds of "writing"). On the other side, there is an addressee who hears and reads ("reading" is a response of the addressee to what the author writes).

The intention of the author, his conscious will in creating meaning, is the basis of this relationship. Thus what is expressed beyond the conscious intention of the author is recognizable as the most difficult task of the interpreter. For Dilthey expression is the expression of the thoughts and intention of the author. The reader or interpreter should match himself with the horizon of the author's thoughts and this is the only basic work in interpretation.

Likewise, Schleiermacher, who regarded the understanding of the author's "intention" as possibly a difficult undertaking, has no doubt that among different interpretations the author's intention is the closest interpretation of the true and final meaning of the text. According to the classical theory of hermeneutics, the main relationship between author and reader, apart from the distance of time between them, is a type of exchange of feeling and ideas.

It is a type of psychological chorus which is usually not created easily. It has happened many times that we do not understand the meaning of the text yet we reach fresh understanding each time we read it. But our inability in the difficult and long

process of understanding does not prove that the text lacks meaning. On the contrary, it proves that meaning could not be recognized quickly and easily and that it hides it self.

Of course, this traditional perspective of hermeneutics, like the modern one, has had many adherents and as a result a large number of works and articles have been published, promoting and studying the theory. All agree that the text has a final and true meaning and that writing about the text means finding the author's intention. Therefore, as a final result they attempt to get to know about the life, works and thoughts of the author. One of the most important works by these writers in defense of "the final meaning of the text" and "the author's intention" is Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* published in 1967. He published a collection of his treatises under the title *The Aims of Interpretation* in 1976. In this volume he responded to a number of criticisms raised by the New Critics and Deconstructionists aimed at classical hermeneutics and his works. In both books, Hirsch to some extent returned to Dilthey's issue and identified his aim as the foundation of a theory which recognizes the validity of the text in evaluating the author's intention, and assesses interpretation on the basis of this principle. On the other hand, Hirsch's job is to look for a final and objective principle through which one could distinguish between accurate and inaccurate interpretation and separate them.

According to Hirsch, difference in interpretation is not that important since it is based on a common understanding of the text. The descriptions of these understandings will lead to different interpretations. The differences are the result of various methods of reasoning and distinguished perceptions. As in science, different perceptions and hypotheses will ultimately reach a single phenomenon or law; distinctive interpretation will also ultimately lead to a single meaning. The main point is the distance between each interpretation and the single correct perception; although its discovery is difficult it is not impossible. Therefore, the methods of critical expression and its different forms could be various and of different types. Nevertheless, the basic evaluation of the significance of a work is one and not more.¹

Hirsch insists that it is a big mistake to regard understanding and interpretation as if they were the same. There are four functions of understanding, interpretation, evaluation and criticism in each literary text and, truly, separating them is as difficult

as it is essential and significant.² Hirsch recognized the meaning of the text as non-historical. It means that meaning will not undergo change with the passage of time. The meaning of the text is merely that which the author has in mind and its true instance is “the author’s intention.” Hirsch emphasizes that it might be a fact that the “suitability” or “correspondence” of a single work might differ from period to period; nevertheless, the meaning of its text will not change. Understanding this suitability or actually “significance of meaning” of the text is the job of the critics not interpreters. Hirsch believes that those who wrongly regard criticism and interpretation as the same will lead to continual misunderstanding in “the history of interpreter.” The critic could evaluate the suitability of the text in each period but the interpreter is merely looking for the true and final meaning which has been in the author’s mind. It is revealed to us after realizing his intentions.

According to Hirsch, there are no more fruitless ideas like creating fresh meanings of a text and regarding it as fruitful. He insists that such a precept is based on a mistake. We could not separate meaning and significances. This perspective will finally lead us to rejection of meaning. Many meanings are nothing but invalidating the final meaning.

3.2. Logic of validation in understanding

The perspective of philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer on the nature of understanding and their viewpoint on the problem of “truth” leaves no space for introducing the issue of “validity” in interpretation. The reason is that the mission and aim of hermeneutics for these two is limited to fundamental ontology. Understanding is clarified in ontology: what is the essential structure of understanding? What role do elements such as tradition, effective history, the author’s semantic horizon, and his pre-assumptions and expectations play in the process of understanding? Philosophical hermeneutics does not judge the different and contradicting understanding of a single work since it has kept its distance from epistemology and methodology and chosen a more fundamental matter (ontology of understanding) to treat. The interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics also helps to distance this kind of hermeneutics from the issue of the judgment of understanding and their appropriateness and inappropriateness; since “truth” is the clarification of the thing itself.³ Therefore, where there is an “understanding” the event of “truth”

will be there too.⁴ Accordingly, every understanding includes truth too. Therefore, there will be no place for raising the problem of better, more appropriate and valid understanding as compared to invalid understanding. The only issue which could be raised according to philosophical hermeneutics will be the issue of difference in understanding of a work. One could not say that our understanding is better or more appropriate than other understandings.⁵

But Hirsch in his debates and thoughts on the nature and accuracy and validity of interpretation and the bond between meaning and interpretation develops a kind of hermeneutics and expresses a theory different from the ideas of Gadamer. He attempts to guarantee the appropriateness and objectivity of interpretation through the revival of the concept of the author's intention.

The aim of Hirsch's efforts is to pave the way for exiting from the hermeneutic circle of Heidegger and Gadamer and to construct a bond between the author's intention and the interpretation of the hidden meaning in order to achieve the criterion of validity in interpretation as a principle.⁶ Hirsch recognizes "the author's essential intention" as the main criterion for "appropriate interpretation," regarding the basic mission of interpretation of texts as the discovery of this principle.

In *The Aims of Interpretation*, Hirsch postulates that the criterion will ultimately lead to the plots of the psychological perspective. The criterion for examining the accuracy and inaccuracy of interpretations of a text is to see which meaning from among the different ones is regarded as appropriate by the writer of the text. What is regarded as the fundamental mission of the interpreter in hermeneutics is the reconstruction of the author's intention, his viewpoint, interests and understandings as well as his world. Needless to say, the process of this examination is highly complicated and difficult. But one, at the end, could achieve a criterion or a principle in interpretation that is the reconstruction and identification of the essential intention of the author.⁷

Hirsch recognizes the responsibility of the interpreter as an effort made to realize the intention of the author. Unlike those who separate the text from its author and assume the aim of interpretation of the text as merely the understanding of its language, he believes that making efforts to understand the language of the text,

independent of the intention of the author, is a wrongful act since it is impossible to achieve a definite answer.

The text is the key to understanding the intention of the author. But it is not enough and the interpreter is supposed to give attention to reaching what is beyond the text to the best of his ability. Without information about the author and his or her cultural and personal orientations it is not possible for the interpreter to reproduce the intellectual world of the author. It is wrong to expect all the desired conclusions from the text itself. The interpreter has to add his findings from other sources to the data of the text itself if he or she intends to interpret the text correctly, realize the intention of the author and reproduce his or her conciseness. Conclusions drawn about the author are obtained from sources outside the text.

3.3. Production or Reproduction

Unlike romantic hermeneutics which recognizes the action of understanding as the "reproduction" of the author's mentality and intention, Gadamer defines the action of understanding and interpretation as "productive," that is new meaning is produced in the process of text interpretation. However, the interpreter's mentality and prejudgments as well as the text itself both play a part in the production of meaning. As he asserts, "the meaning of the text goes beyond its author. The secret that understanding is not merely reproduction and is always a productive activity is hidden in this point."⁸

Gadamer's discussions about the effect of prejudgment on the action of understanding, the influence of history and tradition on understanding, his emphasis on the practical aspect of perception and the fact⁶ that the application and juxtaposition of the meaning of the text in the present time and the hermeneutic position of the interpreter are a part of the understanding process, all allude to the fact that the interpretation and understanding could not be summed up in the reproduction and reconstruction of the author's intention. Nevertheless, understanding is productive and the interpreter's mentality and the semantic horizon of the text contribute to this creation and semantic production. The questions the interpreter addressed to the text, which is the crystallization of the impact of tradition, and the interference of his prejudgment in the action of understanding,

represent the means of the interpreter's function and the explanation for the secret of the fact that understanding is productive..⁹

According to Gadamer, understanding the text is the same as a dialogue between writer and reader. The outcome of the dialogue is influenced by both sides. Therefore, although the aim of interpretation is listening to the text and finding a way into it, the interpreter on his side in the dialogue has a major share in the formation of the final product of the dialogue – which is the same as the meaning of the text and the content of interpretation. Perception takes place when horizons are fused; when the semantic horizon of the text is combined with the semantic horizon of the interpreter, a sort of agreement occurs between the interpreter and the text. Thus both contribute to the construction of the content of the understanding and interpretation of the text..¹⁰

The theory that alludes to the "productive" aspect of understanding and interpretation has been criticized by thinkers of objective hermeneutics including Hirsch. Following is a brief summary of their criticism. Understanding is to perceive the mentality of another person. Thus interpretation hopes to conquer the mentality and psychological world of another person. The interpreter has no direct access to the mental world of the other person. The result is that the perception of the psychological world of others demands the confrontation of the interpreter with some meaningful matters that represent this mental world..¹¹

Understanding always goes beyond the perception of the meaning of the words and sentences. In confronting the written or spoken discourse, the reader or listener takes part in a form of life like what the writer or speaker has had. Therefore, in addition to the perception of the meanings of expressions, the interpreter takes part in the mentality and ideas that resulted in the discourse. It implies that understanding the text is a kind of "reconstruction" since the creative mind of the author through his works and meaningful forms conveys content to the person involved in the interpretation process. It is a meaning obtained from the forms and works by the interpreter, what the author has intended from the beginning. Understanding is in the nature of "reproduction" itself. In this "reproduction," the interpreter interprets the statements and meaningful works of another mind into his own language and internalizes it. This "reproduction" is of a content and action similar to the mentality

and internal meaning of the creator of the work, which has resulted in the creation of meaningful forms.¹²

The objective understanding of the author's mental world demands interpretation since the time distance between the interpreter and the text creates some obstacles by way of achieving objective understanding. The process of interpreting the text, like other cognitive processes, is of the subject-object essence and the interpreter and the subject confronting an object called text. But it differs greatly from other cognitive processes. The reason here is that the object is to express and manifest the mentality of the other person. Thus the responsibility and mission of the interpreter is the "recognition" or the "reconstruction" of aims, messages and ideas dormant in these statements and meaningful issues. The proper understanding that is the objective and precise recognition of the aims and mental messages of the author always confronts some obstacles which should be overcome by the interpreter in the process of interpretation through the implementation of suitable methodology.¹³

Emilio Betti,¹⁴ Hirsch and all other thinkers of objective hermeneutics in general believe that in the process of hermeneutics, interpretation is the end to reach the mentality and aims of the author. because the interpreter attempts to move from interpretation of the work to understanding of the mentality which has caused its creation, and recreate the semantic world crystallized in the face of the work. The reproduction and recreation are carried out by the interpreter who works out in his mind the foreign mentality of the owner of the work, realized and crystallized in the object of interpretation, and rethinks and recreates it in his mind. As a result, a thought or feeling, similar to what the creator of the work had in mind when he created it, is created with the help of interpretation within him.¹⁵

Thus it could be postulated that the mission of the interpreter is to elucidate the intention of the thought and mentality manifested in the works of an author and the aim is that the style of the thought manifested in them be understood by the interpreter. The intention and style of the author which is manifested in his works is nothing which is mechanically achieved by interpreters. In the process of understanding the meaning and style, the interpreter has no absolute reactionary stance but realizing such a goal demands an active interpreter. Meaning and style do not automatically enter the mind of the interpreter. However, he should endeavour to

recognize and reproduce the meaning and style of the originator. This task is achieved within the framework of the interpreter's mind and through care, insight and mental intuition.

According to Hirsch, the aim of the interpreter is to reproduce within himself the logic, orientations and the cultural data of the author or simply the author's intellectual world. The scope of the reproduction is the part of the author's mindset on which the verbal meaning is based. For example, when a speaker tells a lie and hides this fact from his listeners, the understanding of his speech is not conditioned by understanding this hidden part of his mindset; because in that case there would be a nullifying intention and the speaker would not reach his goal, that is telling a lie.

Understanding and interpretation is not limited to the understanding and full reproduction of the author's or speaker's mindset. A speaker has a hidden intellectual intention and orientation that are of no consequence in shaping the verbal meaning of his speech. The aim of the interpreter is to understand a mindset which has created the text. The author is not responsible for reproducing the true and comprehensive mindset of the author. Many speakers are conscious of the verbal meaning of what they say. To understand the intention and the hidden orientations which are of no consequence and are not crystallized in the verbal meaning of speech is not the responsibility of the interpreter..¹⁶ Hirsch insists that there should be no exaggeration of the role of rules in the process of interpretation. He postulates that it is not possible to reach the author's intention through reliance on "method" and a set of rules. Following certain rules does not guarantee realization of the author's intention and its appropriateness, a responsibility usually achieved through "method".

According to Hirsch, the process of interpretation has two stages: the first is to get the intention of the author which is where the interpreter guesses the meaning of the text; the second stage is to evaluate the validity of the guess. At the former stage, there is nothing said about method and rules since neither are employed for guessing. In the process on interpretation, "method" functions at the second stage.¹⁷

The interpreter could not be sure of perfect understanding of the text. He only makes guesses that should be evaluated. Of course, there is no certain method in the process of interpretation and understanding (guessing); however, criticism and validation of

guesses is methodical. Thus the process of understanding the text requires “the logic of validation”. The most basic problem of interpretation is to guess the true intention of the author. Access to the intention is possible but it is not mostly assuring for the interpreter. The aim of interpretation is to examine ways for increasing the probability of the appropriateness of interpretation. In other words, the rules of “the logic of validation” should be qualified and, in this light, identify the appropriate and valid interpretation from among various interpretations.¹⁸

According to Hirsch, the place of deciding on hermeneutic rules is the area of criticism and validating guesses or “logic of validation,” because the interpretation of guesses should be especially made in terms of every text regarding the set of evidence. Of course, there is no general or specific method for this process. But there are many skills and elements at the level of criticism and validation of interpretation to be considered in shaping “the logic of validation”.

Hirsch believes that the two stages of the interpretation process, that is guesswork and hypothesis as well as the critical stage are not completely separated; the interpreter simultaneously and gradually reproduces meaning and makes guesses and criticism. The permanent coexistence of criticism and guesswork is no obstacle to the belief in methodical criticism.¹⁹

Before illustrating the criteria for identifying valid interpretation, it is essential to introduce Hirsch’s attitude of validation in interpretation. Here is a reference to his most important beliefs about valid interpretation and its nature:

The author’s intention is not clearly available for the interpreter. The interpreter cannot assuredly link up his understanding to the author’s intention and judge it. The interpreter merely reaches the meaning of the text in his intellectual world, but he does not read the author’s mind and juxtapose it against his own mind in order to compare the two and compare his understanding with the author’s intention.

The impossibility of being sure in understanding the author’s intention should not lead to the interpreter’s disappointment in reading the author’s intention. Logically speaking, the impossibility of sure understanding does not imply the impossibility of understanding because knowledge and understanding should not be regarded as equal

to assurance and finality. Much good and useful knowledge do not claim to bring about assurance and certitude.²⁰

The aim of interpretation is to be the achievement of present validity, which is a determinable and identifiable matter since achieving ultimate correctness in interpretation is an unachievable ideal:

This distinction between the present validity of an interpretation (which can be determined) and its ultimate correctness (which can never be) is not, however, an implicit admission that correct interpretation is impossible. Correctness is precisely the goal of interpretation and may in fact be achieved, even though it can never be known to be achieved. We can have the truth without being certain that we have it and, in the absence of certainty, we can nevertheless have knowledge of the probable. We can reach and agree upon the most probable conclusions in the light of what is known.²¹

Judging the validity of different interpretations of a text leads to various results. It is not that we could always identify the highest probability about an interpretation because evidence might equally validate two or more interpretations when there is no final interpretation as the most probable one:

Sometimes the arguments for two interpretive hypotheses are so strong and our knowledge so limited that a definite decision is impossible. The aim of validation, therefore, is not necessarily to denominate an individual victor, but rather to reach an objective conclusion about relative probabilities. In comparing two interpretations it is always possible to reach a firm conclusion, but it may be simply that the two hypotheses are, on the basis of what is known, equally probable, and that no definite choice can be made. One may conclude that interpretation A is more probable than B, that it is less probable, or that neither of these conclusions is warranted. This third sort of decision is just as firm and objective as the other two, and it is just as much a decision. Thus, one function of validation can be to show that two or more disparate interpretations are equally valid and thereby to spur further research, since two disparate interpretations cannot both be correct.²²

Interpretative theorization is the probable judgment and evaluation which might be valid or invalid. Hirsch's "logic of validation" for evaluating interpretation is based on the logic of probability. Logic of probability and absence of certitude are usually based on statistics and quantitative data. However, the validity of probable evaluations is expressed mostly by means of qualitative terms like "less", "more" and "much". Hirsch claims that it is not possible to provide precise statistical and mathematical data about interpreting the text. However, one could practically use these qualitative terms about different interpretations through the evidence and thus attaching more validity to one probability judgment among others.

The use of the logic of probability about human and historical issues is not flawless. Some assume that the issue of historical sciences is completely different from experimental sciences. Hirsch believes that one could not invalidate alternative assumptions in historical sciences as easily as one does it in experimental sciences in order to determine the objective interpretation. He accepted the basis of Carl Popper and announced that the genuineness of interpretation and theory or the probable judgment could not be proved by evidence. But the only way is to invalidate alternative theories and evaluations and select a theory. According to Hirsch the same method is to be used for interpretations of every text. Of course, in human and historical sciences where one has the understanding of the text, sometimes there are contradictions in the evidence and it becomes difficult to nullify alternative theories. In such circumstances, there could be no single probable evaluation regarded as a valid understanding and the most probable interpretation.²³

The major problem in evaluating different interpretations is the method of determining the value of the evidence supporting each interpretation. The solution to this problem is to prove that the evidence of one interpretation compared to others is the most important. To do so there is a need for certain principles and criteria, which could stand as the basis of the objective choice for the importance of evidence. The validation of each interpretation (probable evaluation) depends on its correspondence to the principles and criteria. Hirsch claims that such principles and criteria might be determined and identified.²⁴

Paul Ricour accepts the claim of Eric Hirsch that among various interpretations of a text one cannot show that an interpretation is true and final through the logic of

experimental confirmation but the only resort is to follow the logic of probability. One should show which reading is more probable among different readings of a text. He states, "An interpretation should not merely be probable but also more probable than other interpretations." There is a criterion for measuring the relative superiority which could be easily deducted from the logic of mental probability.²⁵

It is clear so far that Hirsch does not believe in a sure and definite perception of the author's intention. The interpreter should aim at showing that one reading of a text is more probable than other readings. Verification is to be sought in hermeneutics. Verification is a process in which relative probabilities occupy the seat of acceptance and proving. To prove that reading is more probable one should pay attention to the four principles and criteria which could be called "principles of verifying interpretation".²⁶

The First Principle: Legitimacy. It is the first step in hermeneutics to show that a certain reading of the text is possible and probable as regards linguistic norms and criteria. The reading needs to be allowed within the framework of general linguistic norms which constitute the text.

The Second Principle: Correspondence. Each reading should take into account all linguistic components of the text and the supposed interpretation should correspond to the components. A reading that overlooks some parts of the text would not belong to the probable interpretations.

The Third Principle: Generic Appropriateness. The interpretation of a text should correspond to its type. For example, if we are dealing with a scientific text it will not be appropriate to read it as a text with reference and symbol. Overlooking this criterion will lead the interpreter into making mistakes about "the semantic type of the text".

The Fourth Principle: Plausibility or Coherence. The earlier three principles would allow different readings of the text. In other words, they were not obstacles to various readings. Nevertheless, the fourth principle would enable the interpreter to choose an interpretation with greater correspondence to the text. Therefore, the major principle for verifying the interpretation is its coherence in terms of the text. Hirsch attempts to prove confirmation through coherence requires the reconstruction of all

aspects related to the author's mindset. He promotes the idea that objectivity in interpretation of the text requires a clear reference to the subjectivity of the speaker. Of course, it seems to be paradoxical to have the objectivity of interpretation and the subjectivity of the speaker together. However, this matter makes clearer the nature of coherence.

The most coherent interpretation is formed according to all aspects of the formation of the speaker's mindset, consciousness and intention. Therefore, coherence depends on understanding the context. That is, understanding the semantic horizon of the author's attention. The components of meaning would be acceptable once they are coherent and correspond to the semantic horizon.

Someone who misreads a text thinks that he has introduced an ideal and coherent reading of the text. But, in fact, he has not realized the author's semantic horizon. There is no absolute criterion for definite evaluation among different readings which claim to be coherent. The solution to the problem is to understand which of the grounds on which the coherence of each interpretation is based, is the most probable to be true.²⁷

On the basis of Hirsch's theories, determining the meaning of the text or determining the most probable in terms of coherence could not be arrived at merely through consulting the text. However, whatever helps to reconstruct the meaning of the text, consciousness and the mindset of the author should be regarded, be it beyond the text and a part of the cultural and social data.

¹ Hirsch, Eric D, *Validity in interpretation*, p. 144.

² Ibid., p. 135.

³ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, pp.256,261.

⁴ Gadamer, Hans Georg, *Truth and Method*, pp.486,490.

⁵ Ibid, p.297.

⁶ *The critical circle*, p.5.

⁷ Hirsch, Eric D, *The aims of interpretation*, P. 242.

⁸ *Truth and Method*, p.296.

⁹ Ibid, P.375.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.389.

¹¹ *The critical circle*, pp.11,12.

¹² *Contemporary hermeneutics*, pp.32,33,40.

¹³ Ibid, pp.35,47.

¹⁴ Emilio Betti, the well-known Italian lawyer, was born in 1890 in Camerino and died in 1968. He was educated at various universities in Milan and Rome. He established the Institute of Interpretation Theory in 1958 at the University of Rome. He made a particular study about the theory of interpretation. Of course, he is not a professional philosopher and should not be regarded as mainly concerned with hermeneutics. However, his hermeneutics is not to be considered as immature and imprecise among other hermeneutic groups. (Maurizio Ferraris, *History of Hermeneutics*, p.234.)

¹⁵ Ibid,pp.32,33,*Validity in interpretation*, p.242.

¹⁶ *Hermeneutics*, PP. 63-64.

¹⁷ *Validity in interpretation*, PP. 235, 241, 243.

¹⁸ Ibid, P. 203.

¹⁹ Ibid, P. 204.

²⁰ Ibid, PP. 16-17.

²¹ Ibid, P. 173.

²² Ibid, PP. 172-173.

²³ Ibid, PP. 176, 180, 181.

²⁴ Ibid, PP. 180, 182, 183.

²⁵ *Hermeneutics and Social Sciences*, p. 213.

²⁶ Ibid, P. 536.

²⁷ Ibid, PP. 237-238.

Chapter Four: Hirsch's Criticism of Gadamer

4.1. Introduction

Hans-George Gadamer, the contemporary German philosopher, was born in 1900 in Marburg, Germany. Heidegger, his tutor, was under the influence of German thought.¹ He is the founder of the modern school of hermeneutics and his ideas are regarded as the pivot of hermeneutic issues. He tried to raise once again the hermeneutic question by means of Heidegger's ontology and his latest works about the philosophy of poetry.²

Gadamer is interested in Heidegger and describes him in exaggerative terms. On the other hand, as a poet, he meticulously traces the issues of language, poetry, the secret of the creation of art as well as the manifestation of the artist in his or her work of art, which has been introduced by Heidegger. He attempts to enliven all these ideas and principles once more in the mainstream hermeneutics. He pays attention to Dilthey's hermeneutics but emphasizes that the return does not imply the repetition of Dilthey's issues and overlooks Heidegger's ideas. Unlike Dilthey, he does not look for a particular methodology for humanities. However, Gadamer wants to show, criticize and evaluate "the principles of hermeneutics" concealed in the structure of humanities throughout history.³

The follow-up was the publication of his book *Truth and Method* in 1960, which turned him into the founder of all contemporary hermeneutic issues. The title of this book, taken from the "truth" of Heidegger and "method" of Dilthey,⁴ shows the duality of Gadamer's debate.

Gadamer's works mainly aim at developing Heidegger's ideas in the book *Being and Time*, rooted in thoughts like pre-understanding, human experience and ontological rules. At this time, of course, Jacques Derrida followed Heidegger's philosophy in an innovative way and tried to expand it. But Derrida mainly focused on Heidegger's later and anti-metaphysical works. Nevertheless, Gadamer influenced by the thoughts of Heidegger's first phase, or the fundamental ontology and phenomenology has

scrutinized and developed his ideas. The major issue for Gadamer and Heidegger is language and historicity.⁵ Gadamer introduces a particular methodology which only corresponds with the theory of historicity and language, and challenges any kind of method based on non-historical methodologies.

Gadamer's hermeneutics as a philosophical theory about the nature of understanding and interpretation raises many questions and at the same time has a deep impact on the process of interpretation and hermeneutics.

Gadamer followed in the footsteps of Heidegger through criticism and rejection of fundamental hermeneutics which was based on faith in mentality and intention and without dependence of pre-understanding. Like Heidegger, criticizing objectivity in understanding, he emphasized the interpretative and historical features of all forms of understanding.

Gadamer's share in the history of hermeneutics, with special regard to his inclination to linguistics and the pluralism of understanding, is a major one worthy of attention. In contrast to hermeneutic theories, which regard understanding as a psychological process, Gadamer announces that one should look at understanding as a linguistic phenomenon. He introduces the concept of the linguistic nature and role of language in understanding in order to bridge the hermeneutic gap between the author and interpreter.⁶

The major key to Gadamer's hermeneutics is "the hermeneutic experience" in the light of which he introduces the principles of politics or praxis. His philosophy represents a combination of two movements and two basic discourses: Firstly, the movement from specific to general hermeneutics or from religious to supra-religious hermeneutics; secondly, the movement from the epistemological attitude in humanities to the ontological.⁷

Gadamer insists that a human being cannot free himself from the bond of historical happening. On the contrary, he is constantly in the context of history and his knowledge is determined through a historical happening.⁸ The theory of understanding and the fusion of horizons are rooted in this idea.⁹ In the theory of understanding, Gadamer follows an attitude which deserves much attention. He

believes that application is the essential part of every understanding. As understanding always includes interpretation, it already incorporates application.

Of course, what Gadamer means by "application" should not be mistaken for what is common in applied sciences. The problem in applied sciences is how to correctly use the scientific findings of the discipline. The applied way intended by Gadamer is not a scientific or ethical recommendation. What he suggests is not to match knowledge with the specific conditions. What he has in mind is the ontology of understanding and to clarify the point of how and under what conditions understanding is achieved. Therefore, his emphasis on the applied aspect of understanding implies that this aspect is effective in the realization of the phenomenon of understanding. Thus understanding is both interpretative and always pertains to application. Understanding a work, text or a historical event happens with regard to application.

Gadamer is mainly interested in Greek philosophy and in many cases somehow seeks help from Aristotle's and particularly Plato's ideas. There is scarcely a debate not accompanied by the interpretation, quotation or the confirmation of the ideas of one of these two philosophers.

Among later philosophers, Gadamer was mostly interested in Hegel and Heidegger. His deep praise of some of Hegel's theories, of course, does not imply that he absolutely acknowledges them. When Gadamer is inspired by Hegel he accompanies the acceptance with some interference and criticism.¹⁰

Gadamer's studies after writing *Truth and Method*¹¹ followed a new and more or less different direction from the content of the book. The practical philosophy and the problem of social sciences are his two major concerns during the years following the writing of the book. Jurgen Habermas's share¹² in Gadamer's intellectual attitude towards issues of social sciences is quite evident. Gadamer's ideas and thoughts in this regard are reflected in the second volume of his complete works.¹³

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics fight back with two attitudes: one is the romantic traditions of German idealism and another is the positivistic attitude which has dominated the social sciences and humanities. Gadamer first rejects German idealism and thus criticizes idealistic aestheticism as well as romantic historicity. The secret to his disagreement with the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey is

that the romantic insight of the two is influenced by the dominance of German idealism.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics does not correspond to methodical rationality. Thus it does not reflect the dominance of the positivistic precepts. Throughout the book *Truth and Method* the positivistic idea which says "the only path to truth is to follow the method of understanding" has been criticized. Gadamer challenges the positivistic assumption of experimental and human sciences. Of course, the matter has already been accepted by Karl Popper and some other philosophers of the science. Thus in many places in his writings about this aspect of *Truth and Method* Gadamer states, "The work might have come late."¹⁴

4.2. Hirsch's Criticism and examination of Gadamer's ideas

The appendix to the book *Validity in Interpretation* specifically examines the ideas of Hans Gadamer. At the beginning of the book, Hirsch introduces an elaboration on his most important viewpoints. Hirsch believes that even before him the idea of the historicity of understanding and the impossibility of achieving objective understanding of the text had been there. Of course, Gadamer has introduced a new aspect on the idea where he gives life to some of the old concepts. According to Hirsch, Gadamer's hermeneutics include some internal contradictions and incoherence.¹⁵

4.2.1. Theory of Intention

Hirsch criticizes Gadamer's viewpoint about rejection of the author's intention. He postulates that, according to Gadamer, belief in the author's intention of the meaning of the text necessitates the psychology of the romantic hermeneutics. Meaning of the text is not hidden in the mental process but rather it is hidden in the subject or the text. Despite its independence from the author and interpreter both contribute to it.¹⁶ Therefore, in modern hermeneutics, Gadamer states that the meaning of the text exists independently of the author's intention. It is always beyond the meaning intended by the author. This belief necessarily leads to the lack of fixity of meaning as well as the abundance of interpretations, none of which reflects the truth.¹⁷ Thus Hirsch, regarding his criticism of this relativism of Gadamer, asserts that

"Interpretation is a valid and correct act only when the text is not ambiguous and has one meaning."¹⁸

Dislocating the center of interpretation in modern hermeneutics and dispensing with the author's intention, Gadamer has brought about the inclination towards relativism in interpretation. He introduced the precept of "logic of conversation," and the theory of dialogue regarding the textual meaning and the author's intention as idealistic. Under the influence of the theory of horizon and "global life" and the phenomenon of interpretation, he admits that the meaning of the text like its position is changeable. Thus the text would respond according to the interpreter's question. The difference in interpretations is rooted in the difference in the questions and horizons. Therefore, one could not set any objective criterion beforehand for the correctness of interpretation.

Hirsch criticizes Gadamer's inclination to relativism in interpretation and his rejection of a definite and objective measure in exegesis; he has also started an important challenge to Gadamer in hermeneutics and the science of interpretation. Gadamer regards the theory of the finality and definiteness of interpretation as an unrealistic attitude. He also regards the indefinite process in interpretation as the basis for interpreting the text.

Hirsch's major role when criticising Gadamer's hermeneutics is, in one way, to formulate a system of the theory of interpretation in order to guarantee the validity and correctness of the interpretation of the text. As he regards Gadamer's hermeneutic inclination in regarding interpretation as a sort of philosophical relativism which shakes the foundation of correctness and definiteness of interpretation, he tries to show that the major subject of interpretation and the essential goal of interpretative understanding is to discover and understand the author's intention and that the only measure of the correctness of interpretation is the theory of intention. Hirsch postulates that if we accept that understanding and interpreting a text is the only reasoning and finding the meaning intended by the author, then we would realize that the basic mission of the interpreter is to reproduce the logic, attitudes, interests and generally the author's world.¹⁹

Gadamer questions the theory of intention and regards it as an idealistic and inefficient attitude in interpretation. He introduced the measure of dialogue and fusion of horizons about the correctness and validity of interpretation. He has a key role in the hermeneutic circle. However, Hirsch, in response to the question of the measure of interpretation and its correctness and incorrectness as well as the clarification of the means and the validity of the interpreter's understanding of the text, presents us with a kind of hermeneutics which explicitly challenges Gadamer's attitude. He attempts to explicate the correctness and validity of interpretation through analyzing the theory of the intention of the author. Hirsch shakes Gadamer's historicity and his abundant emphasis on the historical conditions of knowledge and challenges his philosophical attitude.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejects the one and final meaning. The two both regard the explanation of the concepts of "meaning and intention" among the most important philosophical concepts to grasp of this theory and believe that "intentional fallacy" occurs in this attitude. the practical realization of fixed and definite meaning is never possible; furthermore, scholars and philosophers in this field have formulated no means in the knowledge of interpretation for perceiving this essential meaning. In the precept of "intention of the author," intention means the mentality and the mental intent which is in the author's mind. In other words, the intention is related to the internal and mental attitude of the author in composing the text, his feeling and belief as well as interests while writing the text and his spiritual and social atmosphere. Therefore, intention is a completely mental, internal and individual issue.

Accordingly, there should be a distinction between the meanings of intention hidden in the text which caused its writing and the meaning of intention as a kind of criterion. The first meaning is an internal, mental and individual meaning while the second is an external, objective and collective one. Critics of the precept of intention rationalize that fallacy happens when the concept of intention is considered as a measure and basis. Intention, which is of a mental and individual attitude, cannot change into an objective and collective measure. Moreover, intention in the first meaning is inaccessible and there is basically no strategy for its correct perception.

Hirsch admits that interpretations in the best conditions are merely probable and there is no way of achieving absolute certainty. He claims that the interpreter can

boast of achieving the author's intention and intentional meaning only when his interpretation is correct and valid. Hirsch asserts that whenever a person speaks of the validity and correctness of his interpretation, he or she will inevitably be entangled in a net of logical necessities. To make his claim acceptable, he or she should expect his interpretation to be evaluated with an objective and particular criterion. The only unalterable measure in the evaluation of the correctness and validity of interpretations is the proper understanding of the author's intentional meaning.²⁰ Therefore, he believes that the true and basic definition of a precise and valid interpretation is impossible without the principle of the author's intention.²¹

Hirsch rationalizes that the text has a single meaning, which stays the same despite the passage of time and the different methods of interpretative perception. He admits that the key question is not to ask about the correctness or incorrectness of particular interpretations but whether the decision on the correctness and validity of a particular interpretation necessarily requires the belief in the existence of a single and final proper understanding or not. Hirsch concludes that the one valid and proper understanding necessarily corresponds to the author's intentional meaning or intention.

Hirsch scorns Gadamer's attitude, which implies that the meaning of the text is not hidden in the mental process and the theory of intention is invalid. However, its meaning exists in the text itself and is independent of the author. Hirsch draws a distinction between two meanings: first is the meaning which does not change and depends on knowledge not diction and text.²² This unchangeable meaning is the same true meaning which constitutes the author's intention. The true meaning remains independent of any kind of interpretation and linguistic function. The essential aim of interpretation is to perceive this meaning: "If there is no objectivity I believe in one kind of objectivity: that is the unchangeable essential meaning."²³

The second meaning is the one presented to us by the text on the present horizon. It is a changeable meaning. However, the latter meaning depends on the passage of time and the kind of interpretation and its significance changes in relation to the interpreter. The second meaning is dependent and parasitic but the first meaning is essential and true. The fundamental aim of interpretation is the achievement of the

first meaning.²⁴ Hirsch continues by saying that Gadamer was ignorant of this distinction and regarded the dependent meaning as the essential and main meaning.²⁵

4.2.2. Independence of text meaning

Prior to philosophical hermeneutics, the prevalent belief was that every text has a single and particular meaning that is the author's intention while hermeneutics as an art or profession is after reaching this one and final meaning. Nevertheless, philosophical hermeneutics confronted this traditional and current assumption. Sweeping aside the claim that the author's intention is the aim of interpretation paved the way for the acceptance of "pluralism" in meaning.

Gadamer does not regard perception as the search for something in the past or its reconstruction or recreation; however, he believes that perception is to juxtapose the text within the present time. He justified the semantic pluralism of the text through emphasizing the dialogue between interpreter and text and the fact that the meaning of the text is achieved by question and answer and that the meaning of the text is a response to questions posed by the text. The reason is that, according to this idea, the meaning of the text is nothing but its answer to the interpreter's question. Since questions are various and plural there would be various answers, all of which constitute the meaning of the text:

To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question."²⁶

What is said implies that the meaning of the text is more than what the author has intended and even what has been said in the text. In different hermeneutic positions and with new questions one could achieve a new meaning for the text.

Gadamer also writes:

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the

question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it.²⁷

Thus, according to Gadamer, interpretation of the text is an endless action since the fusion of numerous horizons and the endless agreements between the hermeneutic positions of the interpreter with the semantic meaning of the text is possible. If we admit that the perception of the text is nothing but the text's answer to the interpreter's question, and at the same time accept that there is no limitation for the interference of prejudgment and raising questions by the interpreter, then the endlessness of the action of understanding would seem natural. Therefore, one could never claim that he or she has achieved the perfect and final understanding of a text.

One could open a dialogue with one text too in the process of hermeneutic understanding, provided that the interpreter tries to trace the statements of the text prior to attributing his ideas to the text.²⁸ In one sense the meaning of the text is the meaning granted to it by the interpreter since the text brings him to its particular historical position with a posed question. He also would face the text with some predetermined expectations. But in a broader sense, one could say the attribution of meaning to the text is one function of the text because it allows the interpreter to compare his or her expectations to it.

The meaning of the text could attract the interpreter merely to the extent that it has come from beyond him and has overtaken his personal mentality. In one sense, the text actually speaks, that is shows a meaning which attracts our attention, since it addresses us in a way which is very meaningful in terms of our interest and our own particular position. For example, the text as a part of our tradition takes part in forming our position in a way to which we could not show indifference. At the same time, the text is interesting to us since it is a statement introduced from a different viewpoint.²⁹

Gadamer believes in the autonomy of the text and its independence from the author. For this theory to be logical, one should believe in semantic variability and plurality of the text. He postulates that understanding is different from reproduction and it is a productive activity. He believes that understanding the true meaning of a text or a work of art does never end. If understanding a text is a never-ending process then

one could not speak of an interpretation which would correspond or be coherent to the meaning of the text. The problem with Hirsch's claim is that once we reject a definite and single meaning for the text there will be no criterion for determining which interpretation is closer to the truth. Consequently, one should abandon the issue of the validity and appropriateness of interpretation.

Hirsch, in opposition to the theory of "semantic independence," introduces two basic points about literary meaning:

- Objectivity is impossible in interpretation unless meaning itself is unchangeable.
- Meaning is a matter related to knowledge not words.

Hirsch sets himself up against Gadamer and Heidegger with this claim that despite the fact that the significance of a work could change with the passage of time and within the framework of the domain or the various interpretative grounds, the one basic meaning does not alter. The meaning of the text – which is according to the theory the same meaning and intention of the author – as something not contradicting itself is introduced as determinate and reproducible (that is something more collective than individual). The perception of this specific and fixed meaning is completely neutral and impartial and is never infected with the interpreter's intentions and viewpoints about the significance of the work.³⁰

In fact, the basis of Hirsch's criticism is that if we accept Gadamer's statements, we would be liable to relativity and have lost any criterion for judgment. In search of the criterion for judgment, he pays attention to the same issues that preoccupied scholars before Heidegger, that is the issues of Dilthey and Schleiermacher. Hirsch rejects the issue introduced by Heidegger with an ontological view and continued by Gadamer with an epistemological view in which they brought language and understanding closer and closer to each other so that they regarded understanding as language and language as understanding and separated the two from each other. He asserts that "meaning is a mental matter and related to knowledge and recognition not to language and words:

if there is a single moral to the analyses of this chapter, it is that meaning is an affair of consciousness and not of physical signs or things. Consciousness is, in truth, an affair of persons, and in textual interpretation the persons involved are an author and a reader. The meanings that are actualized by the reader are either shared with the author or belong to the reader alone. While this statement of the issue may affront our deeply ingrained sense that language carries its own autonomous meanings, it in no way calls into question the power of language. On the contrary, it takes for granted that all meaning communicated by texts is to some extent language-bound, that no textual meaning can transcend the meaning possibilities and the control of the language in which it is expressed. What has been denied here is that linguistic signs can somehow speak their own meaning - a mystical idea that has never been persuasively defended.³¹

Therefore, Hirsch emphasized two basic points: one is that the meaning of the text is fixed, otherwise there would be no criterion for its objectivity and interpretation; the other is that meaning is a matter related to knowledge and awareness, not to words and language.

Based on what Hirsch introduces in the form of explanation about the changeability of the essential meaning of the text in the passage of time, he regards the intention of the author as the only reproducible and understandable meaning. This single meaning, unlike the theory of Heidegger and Gadamer, is never infected by the interpreter's interests and pre-understandings. For Hirsch this interpretative strategy is the criterion and the basis for correct interpretation. He writes: "In fact, for understanding each text, its understanding as regards the text itself is not only the criterion for its correctness and validity but this is the necessary process for the interpretation of the text. The text is not understood unless it is interpreted and realized on the basis of the text itself."³²

Hirsch criticizes the sceptical historicism and the ideas of Heidegger and Gadamer in respect to the interpretation and regards the emphasis the two philosophers put on the issue, that we understand and interpret the text according to our own concepts, as a diversion in the interpretation of the text. He insists that this statement and belief is

paradoxical. Therefore, the only proper understanding and valid interpretation is that which pays attention to and reproduces the text according to its own meaning.³³

We gather from what Gadamer has said that he regards “tradition” as the basis for validation of interpretation. Once an interpretation follows the tradition it will be correct; otherwise it will be incorrect. The ultimate meaning of a text in a certain condition is determined by the current culture. According to Hirsch, this attitude is similar to that of the “legal pragmatism”, saying the meaning of a law will be that read by the judges. Hirsch is of the opinion that tradition cannot be a criterion to evaluate the validity of understanding the text since tradition is nothing but the history of interpretations of the text. Thus it is continuously changing. How could a changing matter stand as a determinant for validity? Tradition itself faces the problem of genuineness and validity. The hardship of finding the appropriate and the true meaning among a changing and fluid tradition is like finding the true one among different meanings and interpretations of a text. One could not evaluate the genuineness of interpretations without a fixed criterion.³⁴

The history of hermeneutics has drawn a distinction between the art of understanding the text and the art of making it understandable for others. Therefore, he asserts that understanding is different from explanation. Gadamer rejects this distinction and asserts that, ultimately, understanding and explanation are the same and constitute one process.

Gadamer considers the division between understanding and interpretation as a merely abstract and mental matter and in a number of pages of his book *Truth and Method* (366, 372-7, 370) tries to suggest it in the form of a fundamental matter in the theory of interpretation. Thus he says every understanding is an interpretation. Interpretation is necessarily a historical process through which the hidden and inside meaning in understanding becomes continuously clearer and more precise. Therefore, interpretation contributes in the present meaning.³⁵ That is why the supposition that “there is definite and correct interpretation” is an unsubstantial idea.³⁶

The key question Gadamer faces is: what has the interpreter understood? He cannot talk about something called the true meaning of the text for this does not match the

historicity of understanding. For solving the problem he makes use of the idea of "fusion of the horizons".

4.2.3. Logic of Dialogue and Fusion of Horizon

The dialogue between the semantic horizon of the text and the semantic horizon of the interpreter means the bond and breakdown of the two horizons - that is the horizon at the time of writing the text and the horizon at the time of reading or interpreting the text (the horizon of the past and that of the present). Inevitably the two horizons break down at the time of interpretation. Today's horizon is not fixed and static; on the contrary, it is one that is changing and reforming towards perfection.³⁷

Gadamer identifies "the position of dialogue" as the most basic element in interpretation. He asserts that one could realize the meaning of the text only when we are aware of the questions the text is attempting to answer.³⁸ Thus he states that understanding is constantly around the fusion of two different semantic horizons of the author and interpreter, horizons which apparently are independent of each other.³⁹ By putting the logic of dialogue in the center has proved that no question in the past could be understood in abstract and unilateral terms. Thus it should be fused in the context of today to make explicit the hidden meaning.⁴⁰ Once the past texts are read and interpreted this way, they first have a meaning of today and then through interaction with today's semantic horizon the implicit aspects of the text's meanings become explicit.

In contrast with the traditional hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey in which the author's psychology and intention play a central role, Gadamer's hermeneutics insists on a strategy where the hermeneutic understanding is not a kind of a mental and objective bond and a spiritual interaction between the author and interpreter; rather it is mostly a sort of contribution towards a common meaning in which people take part.⁴¹

Accordingly, he believed that hermeneutic understanding is always a form of dialogue. It is a linguistic event where liaison materializes. Hermeneutic understanding is in fact a linguistic phenomenon since the intellectual tradition exists typically in the form of language and often in the form of written texts. Interpreting

such texts implies entrance into dialogue with them. Therefore, understanding occurs in the atmosphere of language. Its characteristic is what Gadamer has called *linguisticity*.

According to Gadamer one should first have a question and then know the text. The question, of course, might be raised by the reader. Then one refers to the text where the question might be formed through textual interaction. Thus the text itself raises some questions and responds to them at a later stage. The text might qualify our questions and thus a kind of deal or dialogue be formed about the questions and presuppositions between the text and the reader. The dialogue as well as question and answer demand a special logic, in other words, the characteristic of our understanding of the text is raised in this process. Then attention to the content of the question and attention to the characteristic of receiving the answer and the realization of perception become significant.

As David Couzens Hoy says with regard to this point:

The meaning of the text is in one sense the meaning given by the interpreter, since the text poses a question to him in his particular historical situation and he approaches the text with given expectations. But in a larger sense it can be said that the projection is a function of the text itself, for the interpreter can test his expectations against the text. The meaning of the text can claim the interpreter only insofar as it comes from beyond him and transcends him. In a sense the text does speak; that is, it shows a meaning that claims our attention by addressing us in a manner relevant to our concern with our particular situation. As part of our own tradition, for instance, the text is constitutive of our situation in such a way that we cannot remain indifferent to it.⁴²

According to Gadamer it is true that every question is a part of meaning or fact and there is basically no meaningless question; one should be careful that a question might have more than one meaning and be interpreted in more than one way. Therefore, one should first get the probable meaning of each question. Then according to the interpretation and the meaning we consider for the question, we should look for its answer in the text.

Josef Bleicher says in this regard:

The central task of the interpreter is to find the question to which a text presents the answer; to understand a text is to understand the question. At the same time text only becomes an object of interpretation by presenting the interpreter with a question. In this logic of question and answer a text is drawn into an event by being actualized in understanding which itself represents an historic possibility. The horizon of meaning is consequently unlimited, and the openness of both text and interpreter constitutes a structural element in the fusion of horizons. In this dialogical understanding the concepts used by the other, be it a text or a thou, are regained by being contained within the interpreter's comprehension. In understanding the question posed by the text we have already posed questions ourselves and, therefore, opened up possibilities of meaning.⁴³

Here Gadamer introduces the logic of question and asserts that when we want to respond to a question or expect a response from others to it we cannot regard it as separate from the historical and relational context it has with other matters. But we should look for its historical context and regard it with other matters which have caused its creation.

On the other hand, Gadamer also believes that we should also pay attention to the logic of understanding in the dialogue since when an answer is found and the text actually understood, what you realize and read is an understanding of today and a reading relevant to the reader's particular mentality. The reason is that the question is basically a question of today and thus its answer would be an answer of today. Thus here a kind of relationship is built up between the text and the interpreter. Gadamer describes this as an interaction between and a combination of the horizon of today (or the semantic horizon of the interpreter) and the horizon of the past (or the semantic horizon of the text).

Both the interpreter and the part of tradition he is interested in contain their own horizon; the task consists, however, not in placing oneself within the latter, but in widening one's own horizon so that it can integrate the other. Gadamer terms the elevation of one's own particularity, and that of the 'object' onto a higher generality,

the 'fusion of horizons'; this is what occurs whenever understanding takes place, i.e. our horizons are in a process of continuous formation through the testing of our prejudices in the encounter with the past and the attempt to understand parts of our tradition. It is therefore inadequate to conceive of an isolated horizon of the present since it has already been formed through the contact with the past. This awareness of effective-history is to assist us in the controlled fusion of horizons.⁴⁴

However, understanding a text is the outcome of a question and answer carried out with the text. This question and answer has its own logic, called "logic of conversation" by Gadamer.

Gadamer believes that dialogue is an effort to reach a real understanding of the text. Introducing the principle of dialogue, the theory of intention loses its value and efficiency. He believes that the distance between the interpreter and the text is not the distance between the doer of identification and its subject because the text has already entered the semantic horizon of the interpreter. When the interpreter is addressed by the text, he identifies the text as something to be understood and have dialogue with about the topic introduced.⁴⁵

The fact is that hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, is not like the traditional belief of Schleiermacher and Dilthey who regarded it as an abstract and subjective perception. Gadamer does not intend to found a system of rules of interpretation. What occupies the center ground of his ideas is to clarify the conditions for general understanding. Such conditions, he claims, would make the intention and mentality valueless. He believes that the methodological strategies of understanding in human and natural manifestations are rooted in history. Thus our understanding has its source in pre-understanding or presupposition and the method through which understanding is realized is totally conditioned and limited by the past, or to use Gadamer's term "the historical effect".⁴⁶

Gadamer assumes that the dialogue between the two horizons of the text and interpreter necessitates the fusion of the two horizons of the past and the present. The past belongs to the author and text while the present belongs to the interpreter and interpretation. Thus the interpretation would be relegated by time, which corresponds to the world of the author and the text. Of course, here Gadamer is influenced by

both Plato and Husserl. He has taken the basis of dialogue from Plato and that of the world from Husserl. When Gadamer wrote his dissertation entitled "Plato's Dialectic Ethics" in 1928 he explicitly talked about Plato's influence in introducing the theory of dialogue. Here Gadamer has admitted that Plato has the major influence on him.⁴⁷

Gadamer believes that understanding the meaning of a text, a work of art or a historical event is possible merely when studied in the light of our position, interests and expectations. Thus our understanding of the works of Plato and Aristotle is different from their understanding of their works and also different from the understanding of their contemporaries of the ideas of the two philosophers. Therefore, it is clear that understanding a text actually means contributing to its meaning. In facing the text, the interpreter is not merely an absolute receiver but he has an effective role in untying the meaning. Therefore, the interpreter's share in the perception of meaning or creation of meaning would equal that of the author. In fact, the interpreter takes part in the construction of meaning and truth of the text. This contribution is the same theory introduced by Gadamer about the contribution of the interpreter and author in the meaning of the text. To describe this sharing and contribution Gadamer has used the term "fusion of horizons".⁴⁸

What Gadamer intends by this term is the combination of understanding the text or the historical event with the position or conditions of the interpreter so that the essential or intentional meaning of the text and author would not be different from the meaning perceived by the interpreter. According to Gadamer, the theory of "horizon" is the fundamental part of hermeneutic understanding. Thus he distinguishes between the hermeneutics of humanities and that of the natural sciences and calls the latter "non-hermeneutic".⁴⁹

On the basis of this idea, the meaning of the text is determined through the support of the historical and hermeneutic context. Thus there will be nothing called meaning of the text independent of the semantic horizon. As regards the last point, Hirsch criticizes Gadamer: if there is no meaning imaginable for the text independent of the semantic horizon of the interpreter, then what will be there for the interpreter to combine with his semantic horizon? "The blend of horizons" is the combination of two elements. Thus something called the true meaning of the text should be there

independent of the semantic horizon of the interpreter to reach a mixture called "the blend of horizon."⁵⁰

Among the main conclusions of Gadamer's hermeneutics is the belief in the historicity of the text. Understanding the text is a historical matter. It is affected by the hermeneutic situation of the interpreter and since the situation changes in every era there would be no fixed meaning for the text. It would be rather fluid and historical.

The influence of history in understanding is closely related to the acceptance of the interference of "the hermeneutic position" in the action of understanding. Gadamer believes that understanding and interpretation are always affected by the hermeneutical position of the interpreter. He supposes that the hermeneutic position consists of ideas which limit the domain of personal view; that is the knowledge of the interpreter of the research topic is formed in the same framework of view. The horizon determines the perspective of the interpreter. We could always be aware of the fact that we are in a hermeneutical position but we can never have a perfect perception of it.

Consciousness of being affected by history is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished.⁵¹

The hermeneutical position of an interpreter is full of his prejudgments about his subject matter. These prejudgments are under the influence of a historical period and tradition in which the interpreter lives. The basis of the idea of hermeneutical position is something called "horizon" by Gadamer.

Horizon is a domain of insight which includes whatever is seen from a suitable and particular perspective. The realization of hermeneutical position is an effort to realize the appropriate horizon of research. Gadamer reminds us that the use of the word horizon in philosophy could be traced back to Nietzsche and Husserl.⁵²



Gadamer criticizes Nietzsche's analysis of the concept of horizon. He particularly objects to Nietzsche's assumption that the historical past includes ages with a particular objective horizon and a determination of a particular perceptive system. Each age contains special beliefs that guide people's action. Gadamer like Nietzsche, of course, repudiates the assumption that human return to the horizon of the past can or should accompany the removal of his or her interests.

Gadamer thinks that we should already have a horizon in order to go to the historical horizon of the past. It is clear that ultimately we remove ourselves to the past, that is the removal takes place with regard to our own horizon. Our historical knowledge is not completely alien and distinguished from the historical horizons of the past and has some aspects in common with them.⁵³ Gadamer has considered the historicity of understanding through confirming and following Heidegger's theory of "being-in the-world" and the analysis he introduces of "being-in the world" of mankind. Heidegger not only analyzed human existence according to his or her time basis but also believed that "existence is time". All kinds of understanding are somehow self-understanding. That implies that the beginning and the end of understanding is inside the person and rooted in a past not created by him and aimed towards a future out of his control. The natural outcome of such attitude towards understanding is that understanding is inevitably historical. A human being can never get rid of his or her historical position.⁵⁴

Gadamer believes that understanding is continuously affected by the semantic horizon and the hermeneutic position of the interpreter. To have the semantic horizon affected by history, understanding is always historical. The other evidence for the fact that understanding is historical is that the horizon itself is a fluid and changing matter. The hermeneutic position of the interpreter is constructed through the support of his prejudgments, a horizon constructed from a collection of past prejudgments and insights. It is not a set of fixed and inflexible beliefs; on the contrary, the interpreter is continuously examining his prejudgments. Therefore, the horizon is constantly changing. The present horizon is not formed without help from the past because examining the prejudgments that have been affected by history and the past is carried out through juxtaposing them with tradition and the past.⁵⁵

Hirsch admits the fact that cultural data change in different eras but this does not violate the fixity of verbal meaning. He believes that Gadamer has not distinguished between meaning and significance. This major negligence is an obstacle that does not give the chance to determine the precise subject of historicity. The existence of cultural difference during the past and the present explains the text as historical but it does not affect the understanding of the text, as mentioned earlier.

Hirsch does not reject historicity in the form of a distinction between the past and present culture. What he rejects is Gadamer's claim that it is impossible to achieve a single and fixed understanding of a text. According to Hirsch, the meaning of the text, which is connected to the consciousness of the author, is a fixed and non-historical matter so that interpreters of different eras might reach the same and valid understanding of it. Definitely, they could not be sure that they have reached an understanding corresponding to the author's intention. For the validity of understanding is different from its assuredness.

Hirsch suggests that the theory of "radical historicism" which recognizes all understandings as historical and fluid could not be experimentally nullified; it is a dogma. The dogmatism of radical historicism would relate to psychology because its content is that people have different mental landscapes and would reach different understandings. Such a report would connect the problem of understanding to the psychological mentality and landscape.⁵⁶

Another point of attention for Hirsch is Gadamer's belief in the role of "pre-judgment" in the process of understanding. The "presupposed" or the "prejudged" are the expectations, orientations and the pre-positioning of the interpreter. According to Gadamer it is impossible to omit "pre-comprehension" and "pre-judgment" from the process of understanding and the interpreter is unable to get rid of the influence of the hermeneutic situation.

4.2.4. Degree of Interference of "Prejudgment" (prejudice) in the Process of Understanding and Expression of Hirsch's Theory

According to Gadamer, the text is not the expression of the author's mentality. Conversation between the interpreter and the text has a factual existence while the condition of the interpreter is the major and significant one for realizing the text. The

mind of the interpreter, at the beginning of interpretation, is not blank but it is a collection of prejudgments, presuppositions and demands founded on today's semantic horizon. Gadamer says that the personal interpretation of an individual is merely a flash of lightening in the enclosed current of historical life. Then his prejudgments are something more than his judgments which constitute the historical reality of his existence.⁵⁷ He believes that we do not have to or cannot get rid of the prejudgments. They are the pillars of our talent for understanding history.⁵⁸

The emphasis Gadamer puts on the expression of the characteristic of understanding is related to the effect of the prejudice which occurs in the action of interpreting the text. What Gadamer means by the role of prejudgments in understanding and interpretation is that our inclinations, viewpoints and expectations interfere in understanding. Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudgment is also to make us aware of it in order to give the text, work of art or any historical subject a chance in the light of this awareness to be introduced with full distinction and otherness before the prejudgments.⁵⁹ Gadamer basically insisted on two aspects or customs as characteristics of understanding. One is its historical aspect, which he usually calls historicity, and the other is the linguistic aspect. As far as the first is concerned, one should say that understanding is not possible without pre-understanding. Instead of the latter term, Gadamer used the term "prejudgment" and was of the opinion that we should eliminate the negative connotations attached to this term from the enlightenment period. Understanding occurs through prejudgments of the continuous tradition. Tradition is a significant expression in Gadamer's hermeneutics. Locating the historical position of mankind is a question raised here whose significance has been overlooked, according to Gadamer, even by Heidegger. We never understand things without prejudgments. Every understanding, even in its simplest form, shows the point where we have started and followed our work with some of these prejudgments. Even change in these prejudgments stems from other elements called prediction and, according to Gadamer, are included in the general level of prejudgment.⁶⁰

One should not forget that Heidegger, through his treatment of "fore structure" in the issue of understanding seriously, resisted the theory of dominance in the age of enlightenment. He was of the opinion that every understanding and interpretation has

a triad structure of understanding and that there would be no interpretation without presupposition. The reason is that when we face a matter we situate it in a particular context; a context given to us which is the outcome of our facticity. This is the first level of understanding or the "fore having." After situating the matter in a particular context we would look at it from a special perspective known to Heidegger as the second level of the triad structure and called "fore sight" by him. Ultimately, we understand the matter in a particular way called "fore conception" by Heidegger.⁶¹

Following Heidegger, Rodolf Boltman (1884-1976) introduced the concept of "pre understanding" and emphasized its role in the realization of understanding and interpretation. Following on from the ideas of these two characters, Gadamer introduced the problem of prejudice and rehabilitated it against the ideas of enlightenment, historicity and romantic hermeneutics. He granted it a pivotal role "so that he believed that, doubtless, there is no understanding without prejudice."⁶²

Gadamer even asserts that our prejudgments have their own importance in interpretation: "the self-interpretation [Selbstbesinnung] of the individual is only a flicker in the closed stream of historical life. For this reason the prejudgments of the individual are more than merely his judgments; they are the historical reality of his being."⁶³

In short, prejudgments are not something we must or can dispense with; they are the basis of our being able to understand history at all.⁶⁴

Therefore, according to Gadamer, prejudices have a positive role in the process of understanding and hermeneutic experience. There is no other way but to look into our prejudices and presuppositions in order to understand things.

Hirsch mentions that the interpreter can change his attitudes and pre-suppositions about the text and adopt a new attitude to it. If one insists that any kind of intellectual array of the text is labelled "pre-judgment" and its unavoidable return to the cultural and intellectual situation of the interpreter, then that would be the same radical historicism. Hirsch could prove that this matter affects the significance, explanation and criticism of the text; but it does not affect verbal meaning and it is possible to achieve a fixed understanding of the text.

Hirsch introduces an image of “pre-understanding” which is naïve compared to historicity and prejudgment and, in fact, it is the same as the logical priority of hypothesis. Before one achieves an understanding of the text there is an introductory and early understanding. The relationship between pre-understanding and the text is similar to that of scientific hypotheses and data. The point that the understanding of the text is based on pre-understanding is the hermeneutic explanation of a relationship existing between scientific hypotheses and experimental data. According to this assumption one should no more recognize pre-understanding as of the nature of orientation and attitude. On the contrary, pre-understanding is actually the primary understanding of the text which is fulfilled through the evidence in the process of understanding. The major question here is which pre-apprehension can be regarded as valid.

Hirsch asserts that linguistic signs, because of the fact that they include linguistic criteria and rules, could convey a single meaning to many people. Therefore, the pre-understanding necessary for understanding the act of understanding is derived from the linguistic signs of the text. Thus the valid pre-understanding should correspond to the linguistic conditions of textual signs.

According to Hirsch, textual understanding is formed based on the primary guessing of the interpreter about the “genre.” Thus the process of understanding the text is similar to understanding in experimental sciences; while deductive theorization which is carried out through the evidence exists in all kinds of knowledge, whether experimental or human.⁶⁵

4.2.5. The Problem of Partnership in Meaning

“Partnership” between the interpreter and author or their “contribution” to meaning is among the issues relevant to the study of Hirsch’s hermeneutics and his criticism of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Hirsch never defines “meaning” as a “personal action” but believes that “meaning” is manifested in language and determined by linguistic rules. Thus the verbal concept for other spoken topics is also achievable and could be shared by them. Hirsch postulates that if the verbal concept is capable of contribution and share then it should have fixity and constancy in this feature, otherwise interpreters would not be able to reproduce the meaning intended by the author.⁶⁶

Hirsch is inclined towards the theory of "the single and essential meaning" through this attitude of determining the author's intention. He appreciates the efforts made by modern criticism in distinguishing between the author's intention and his position in the combination of aims but insists that the single and true concept is the only valid and appropriate meaning in the text. Therefore, the verbal concept depends on and is related to the author's intention and there would be absolutely no relationship with his position in the transition of meaning.

With regard to Hirsch's emphasis on the existence of a definite and final meaning and his belief that the verbal concept is basically general and achievable, it would not be surprising if he asserts that a text could not have two different meanings for two groups of different interpreters. From Hirsch's point of view it means that the correct interpretation of a text is one which achieves the single and essential meaning. The only criterion that all interpreters agree with in the correct interpretations of the text is the classical model of proper understanding of the text that is the "principle of the author's intention." However, Hirsch claims that interpreters should pay attention to the author's intentions since this attention could be the only criterion for achieving the assumption of the owner of the text. Accordingly, he states that once the interpreter decides to introduce a desired and valid interpretation for the readers on interpretation, he should at least try to set the author's intention as the foundation of this hermeneutic attitude.⁶⁷

Such a postulation is along the path of Hirsch's emphasis on the partnership of verbal concept. According to Hirsch, contribution and verbal partnership depend on two positions and conditions: first is that words are to be used in a way to create the same meaning intended by the author; second is that interpreters should be able to discover the fact that the meaning intended by the author is the same concept. It seems that in partnership there is no need for interpreters to discover this fact about the author through the semantic perception of his text. The only desired thing for partnership of the verbal concept is how interpreters discover what has been intended by the author and how to study the text according to the "author's intention". It is not necessary to have the author's intention immediately accessible in the text.⁶⁸

Maybe no attitude distinguishes Hirsch from Gadamer the way the theory of partnership does. While Hirsch bases the partnership on the author's intention,

Gadamer insists on the reciprocal role of the author and interpreter. Gadamer claims that once the meaning of the text is distributed and accepted in partnership it would not be limited to the knowledge intended by the author or the meaning desired by him. However, partnership means interpreters too have a share in the understanding of the text. Thus hermeneutic understanding does not merely depend on the idea of earlier partnership but it mostly emphasizes the creation of meaning by readers. Moreover, where the interpreter and author are not partners in linguistic terms the hermeneutic process would not end in opening up the linguistic rules included by the author. The fact is that understanding the meaning of the text is connected to the formation of the general language. Therefore, it is connected to the perception of the truth of the text. This theory about the hermeneutic understanding separates Gadamer not only from Hirsch but also from the followers of the "theory of reception". The reason is that the meaning of the text could neither be hidden in the author's intentions nor could it be determined in the experience of the interpreter. In other words, when the meaning of the text is understood the meaning could not be attributed to the author or the interpreter. However, the meaning of the text is a language of partnership and contribution which does not belong to anybody but is mostly "a comprehensive idea" of "a general attitude" about the issue concerned. Gadamer defends this theory of hermeneutic understanding by means of phenomenism of "game-playing" as well as the Aristotelian theory.⁶⁹

It should be mentioned that the objective attitude towards the issue of textual understanding corresponds to the prevalent attitude among Muslim scholars. In their interpretative theory Muslim jurists and interpreters have an objective attitude. However, their attitude is not on a par with the contemporary Western hermeneutics in minor issues, such as the interpretative theories of Betti and Hirsch which do not enjoy full correspondence although both believe in objectivism in the interpretation of the text.

4.2.6. Monosemantic and Polysemantic

Explaining the dialectic of monosemantic and polysemantic might be the most basic mission of hermeneutics. Some regard these two kinds of discourse and the challenges between the two as the most complicated and delicate intellectual conflicts in hermeneutic philosophy. This type of conflict nowadays, in Islamic

civilization and especially in Iran in the 1980s, has adapted a theological-interpretative shape while its philosophical nature has been forgotten.

No doubt the deepest challenge among scholars working in the Islamic arena, especially in Iran and Egypt, is the monosemantic and polysemantic attitude of the holy texts in the fields of politics, sociology, ideology, culture, jurisprudence and theology. Today, the diction of multiple readings and separating text from context and also understanding from religion or religious understanding from religion itself, is noticed in a large number of writings by religious scholars in Iran. Here the blending of philosophical and theological-interpretative attitude with political and social attitude is the most harming result of passing from philosophical to political discourse. Doubtless, the feedback from the foundations on this strategy, regarded as the most important precept of hermeneutics, could clarify the root of some theoretical challenges between the two attitudes mentioned above. Now due to the significance of this issue and before introducing Hirsch's relevant theory, as a preliminary note the historical background to this will be briefly given. It will certainly be useful in the comparative study of the two arenas of the East and the West in future issues.

The challenge of a single meaning and multiple meanings of interpreters began from the time when Christians and early apostles were inclined to spiritual interpretation intended for defending the prophethood of Jesus Christ and for debate with opponents, especially about Judaism. Paul, himself a former Jew and an enemy of Christianity, after Jesus Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus, made great efforts to defend and substantiate the truth about Jesus through the Old Testament. In order to find some evidence from the Scripture predicting the good news of the forthcoming Jesus Christ attempted interpretation. Through the second and third centuries, Christianity was able to resist its opponents through interpretation and the introduction of spiritual interpretation, hidden and multiple meanings of the text.

Oregon, the Christian scholar, recognized the Bible and its verses with three different meanings: corporeal, internal and spiritual. Saint Augustine who lived through the fourth and fifth centuries has postulated in his *Christianity* that every verse of the Bible has four different meanings: verbal meaning which shows what God intended; allegorical meaning shows the hidden portion of the ideas; moral meaning that grants

us the rules of everyday life; and the mystical (internal) meaning which is the subject of hermeneutics. The last one shows the place where our conflicts and challenges are resolved.⁷⁰

The tradition was dominant until the time of Spinoza and the new period. But Spinoza in his political theology presented a new meaning and discourse of understanding and the text of the Bible in a way Dilthey believed that new Protestant who emphasized a new understanding of the holy texts is the product of this is Spinoza's hermeneutics. He regards the theory of "common understanding" as the best discourse in hermeneutics for perceiving and understanding texts, especially holy texts. He also regards all people as the target of the holy verses. This theory during the dominance of the monosemantic in the Church and the age of scholastic philosophy, created the deepest challenge, and that of the Protestants with their polysemantic attitude being its most conspicuous one.

Of course, the Protestant's perception was different from Spinoza in terms of "common understanding." In the seventh chapter of his book *Interpretation of the Holy Texts* he postulates that the aim of interpretation is merely to find the original and single meaning of the text.

He believes that the meaning of each text is the truth about that text. Therefore, interpretation is a scrutiny of the genuine and essential meaning of the text.⁷¹

After the age of Spinoza and the Protestant Reformation, two attitudes caused the deepest conflicts about text and meaning. The first one, represented mostly by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Hirsch, regarded the text as fixed with an essential and stable meaning. The second attitude, mostly represented by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, insisted on dialogue, blending of horizons, linguistic creation and consequently multiple meanings. A similar issue and classification is also noticed in the arena of Islamic civilization.

Schleiermacher believed that, with help from hermeneutics, one could reach the genuine and final meaning intended by the author. He asserts that the essential function of this knowledge is to understand the single intention of the author. Schleiermacher believes that every text has one meaning that he calls fundamental

meaning. Thus he insists that the search for various meanings of a text will be in vain.⁷²

Schleiermacher asserts that one cannot interpret a text from a number of perspectives and reach different meanings. He believes that multiple meanings would always lead to incorrect meanings which are far from the single and genuine one of the text. Therefore, one should try to achieve the ultimate and definite meaning.⁷³

Dilthey described hermeneutics as “the perfect, common and basic methodology of humanities”, and regarded “the author’s intention and mental aim” as the meaning of the text. He asserts that through examining documents, facts and historical data one could understand the living world of the author or the world of the author’s intention. Dilthey claims that one could reconstruct the text and the past and this is the basis and essence of interpretation.⁷⁴

Gadamer stating, “There is basically no appropriate, definite and final interpretation”⁷⁵ gave expression to the most outstanding polysemantic discourse. He asserts that the text is not the expression of the author’s intention. However, the interpreter’s conditions and presuppositions are the prerequisite for understanding the text. Therefore, the semantic horizon of the interpreter is more important than the author’s intention. Thus the appropriate interpretation is not to find the final meaning and the author’s intention. It is rather the blending of the two worlds of the interpreter and the author.⁷⁶

In this way, Gadamer, introducing the idea of changeability of meaning of the text, the impossibility of discovering the author’s intention and non-existence of a final, single and definite meaning, puts forward a new perspective in the interpretation of texts, especially sacred scripture.

Paul Ricoeur is the last Western representative in polysemantics of the philosophy of hermeneutics. Criticizing the Aristotelian attitude of giving form to logic, he regarded this effort as an obstacle for change in semantics and believes that the gates of hermeneutics have blocked double or multiple meanings. Despite this fact, Ricoeur praises Aristotle’s strategy of ontology, which corresponded to polysemantics and ambiguity. Ricoeur believes that Aristotle’s two different attitudes are the primary dialectic and challenge of monosemantic and polysemantic.⁷⁷

Ricoeur, who regards language and linguistic creation as the foundation of hermeneutic philosophy, asserts that language is multi-faceted in significance and polysemantic. He postulates that the ideal of the text and language is to contain maximum rather than minimum meaning. One should not try to escape from the polysemantic attitude; on the contrary, one should develop it and increase its significance and semantic power.⁷⁸

Hirsch, who is the most significant critic of the hermeneutics of Gadamer and his followers, in an explicit criticism on the polysemantic principle, asserts that the main responsibility of the interpreter is to find the true and stable meaning intended by the author in the text. The responsibility of the interpreter is to study the logic of the author, his intellectual background and his world. The only mission of hermeneutics is to reconstruct the author's original ideas and to understand the definite and single meaning of the author. The changeability of the meaning of the text and the emphasis put on the interpreter's expectations regarded as invalid in interpretation by Hirsch.⁷⁹

According to Hirsch, Gadamer's theory of production and the rejection of the process of reproduction in hermeneutics require the explicit result that the meaning of the text is always indefinite and the principle of polysemantics should apply and never form a definite and final interpretation of a text. Ultimately, the true meaning of the text will always be hidden. Thus Hirsch emphasizes the principle of stability of meaning claiming that interpretation is valid and correct only when the text is of a single meaning⁸⁰ and there should not be suspended meanings from a number of interpreters and conditions.

According to Gadamer, the belief in the writer's intention in terms of the meaning of the text requires an understanding of Romantic psychologism. It is because the meaning of the text is not embedded in the mental process but rather in the subject or the text. Despite its independence from the author and the interpreter, both have a share in it.⁸¹

Therefore, Gadamer in the new hermeneutics announces that the meaning of the text exists independent of the author's intention and is always beyond the meaning intended by the author. This belief necessarily leads to the indefiniteness of the meaning of the text while none of the accumulated interpretations will be the

absolute truth.⁸² That is why Hirsch criticizes this relativism in interpretation of Gadamer and asserts that interpretation is a valid and appropriate action only when the text is not ambiguous and has one meaning.

The true and basic definition of the nature of accurate and valid interpretation is impossible without giving attention to the author's intention. In this regard, Hirsch postulates that the text has one meaning which remains the same with the passage of time and the emergence of different methods of interpretative understanding. He admits that the pivotal and basic problem is not to question the accuracy or the inaccuracy of specific interpretations but it is the fundamental question of whether the belief in the appropriateness and validity of a specific interpretation necessarily leads to a belief in a single and final accurate meaning or not. Hirsch concludes that the only valid and appropriate understanding will necessarily correspond to the meaning intended by the author. In other words, the criterion for the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the interpretations of a text is whether it has captured the intention of the author or not. The essential and interpretative mission is to reconstruct the author's intention, logic, intellectual background, point of view and his ideological vistas. The definite and true criterion in interpretation is doubtless the objective reconstruction of the author's real thoughts.⁸³

4.3. Conclusion

What has been expressed in the three previous chapters can be concluded in what follows:

Eric D. Hirsch who is a critic of the hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer and their advocates, is among the modern hermeneutics scientists, but he is more inclined towards "romantic hermeneutics" which belongs to Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

The intention of an author has a fundamental role in the hermeneutics of Hirsch and the aim of interpretation is only to discover the intention of the author or speaker. For this reason the text meaning is constantly fixed and unchangeable and it can be interpreted objectively. According to Hirsch "verbal meaning" depends on the awareness and intention of the author not the text words. Basically, words have no meaning on their own unless to be understood and intended by someone.⁸⁴ So, the verbal meaning cannot be changed rather it is consistently fixed. Obviously it was

natural to change the “verbal meaning” if the meaning of the text had belonged to the awareness of the interpreter. But since there is a relationship between “verbal meaning” and the awareness of the author, then the verbal meaning is unchangeable. On the other hand if we believe that the “verbal meaning” is changeable, then there would be no norm to recognize the correctness of interpretation of a text. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders.⁸⁵

Hirsch does not believe in semantical autonomy and states that the meaning of the text is an intentional thing, that is to say, text reflects one’s intention. Hence we would not be able to comment about text meaning without an awareness and intention. So, according to Hirsch the meaning of the text depends on the author’s intention and the awareness of the interpreter has a share in the reconstruction of text meaning. As a result the interpreter has no role in creating the text meaning.

One of the most important discussions that can be seen in his works is about the distinction between “verbal meaning” and “significance” so that a correct understanding of his hermeneutics would be impossible without distinguishing the “verbal meaning” from the “significance”. As a matter of fact many of Hirsch’s hermeneutical results are based on this prominent point. So he asserts a proper principle to defend the objectivity of interpretation. His idea of Significance is to assess the meaning of the text in comparison to some of its context.⁸⁶

In other words the “verbal meaning” is related to the contents of the text and the author’s awareness; however “significance” always belongs to factors outside the text.⁸⁷ That is why the “verbal meaning” is fixed and “significance” is changeable. Therefore, it would be a huge mistake if they got mixed up with each other, as it was propounded by Gadamer and other modern hermeneutical theologians.⁸⁸

Among the key points in his works is a discussion on distinction between Understanding, Interpretation, Criticism and Judgment. He believes very strongly that the blending of these will cause many mistakes among hermeneutical scientists. Since the purposes of these four functions are not the same, so we cannot mix them, although it is not so easy to distinguish them from each other.⁸⁹

Gadammer has combined the four functions of the text in such a way that he regards understanding, interpretation and application as components of the process of text understanding.⁹⁰ For this reason, Hirsch attacked him by saying that it is the root of many sophistries and mistakes. He also believes such an idea promotes scepticism and relativism in approach with regard to understanding of the text. It is evident that if we notice the distinction of the four functions of the text we would never submit to scepticism.⁹¹

Thus Hirsch, after separating these four functions from each other and exposing their aims extensively, stipulates the first two functions belong to the verbal meaning but the latter two are related to the significance.⁹² Out of these four functions, only those belonging to verbal meaning fall into the hermeneutics area, and the others like criticism and judgment do not.

Hirsch is looking for the logic of the validation of understanding. From his point of view, the duty of the interpreter is to struggle to perceive the author's intention and he believes that cutting the link between the text and author is not a good idea. Recognition of the author's intention is possible through the text; having said that, this is not sufficient on its own. The interpreter must contemplate the context as much as possible. The interpreter ought to append the given text's outer data to the inner data for the purpose of correct interpretation and the recognition of the author's intention.

Hirsch understands that the intention of the author must be the criterion for the assessment of the validity and correctness of every interpretation and this intention is an independent entity in which objective evidence can be gathered. This entity's meaning can be identified and validated.

Hirsch emphasises the logic of validation, because the purpose of interpretation is to discover the avenues to increase the probability of the correctness of the interpretation, in order to identify the authentic interpretation from others. In fact the science of interpretation is based on the logic of validation not the methodology of finding the meaning.⁹³ From Hirsch's point of view, identifying the correct meaning of a text or which interpretation is more probable, is not achieved thorough the text,

but whatever helps the reconstruction of text meaning and the awareness and the author's subjectivity must also be considered.

Hirsch's criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which is extensively discussed in chapter four, covers Gadamer's opinions based on lack of the possibility of accessing the objective concept of the text and also its semantical autonomy, which results in diversity of meaning, together with faith in the historicity of understanding and the relativity in hermeneutics which leads to denying the credible and fixed understanding and fixed and non historic. Hirsch stresses the hermeneutics of objectivism while going through Gadamer's opinions about probability of a fixed and objective understanding, meaning that the text meaning is an independent reality from the interpreter and this reality is rooted in the author's intention. The interpreter can access the real objective of the text. Hirsch's criticism of Gadamer states that if the understanding of the text is an infinite process, then you cannot talk about any interpretation which is matching or compatible with the meaning of the text. Basically from the Hirsch point of view, the hermeneutics of Gadamer contains some inner contradiction and incompatibility.⁹⁴

¹ Muller-Volmer, Kurt, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, p.256.

² Ricoeur, Paul *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, pp.59-60.

³ Muller-Volmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, p.256.

⁴ In an ironic expression, Ricoeur makes a reference to the duality in the title of Gadamer's book. He states, "The major question is the extent this work is worthy of the title *Truth and Method*. Should it not be called "*Truth or Method*?" It seems he regards it as impossible to bring together Heidegger's "truth" and Dilthey's "method." He also adds, "If Heidegger with a full-fledged strand towards elevation escapes any sort of debate in humanities, Gadamer along with taking Dilthey's question involves him severely in a more difficult hard talk. (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 60).

⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Basil Black well, 1988, P.41.

⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg , *Truth and Method*, Translated revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York, 1994, P. 389.

⁷ Pourhassan, Qasim, *Comparative Hermeneutics*, p. 263.

⁸ Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Transition and Reason*, P. 38-40, *Truth and Method*, P. 360.

⁹ Ibid, P. 306.

¹⁰ Gadamer, Hans-Georg , *Reason in the Age of Science*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence, 1996, p.xxi.

¹¹ In this book Gadamer enters three spheres. A: Aesthetics: In this part he mostly presents his ideas on Heidegger's issues about poetry; he constantly gives priority to the experience of being attracted and conquered by the topic, over opinion and critical evaluation. B: History: This section treats ideas present in Dilthey's discussions. According to Gadamer, what makes possible the application of a historical methodology at the humanistic and social level is to know that human movement is determined by pre-natal traditions. ∴ Language: In this sphere, he recognizes the linguistic text and its contents as apart from its form and appearance – which is related to semantics. He regards the basic element as the sense of possession and closeness to topics formed by the voice of speakers. (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, p.60) Gadamer follows a single theory in the three spheres. Thus he introduces various elements like "the logic of conversation", "tradition", "the position of dialogue", "contribution", "the semantic horizon" and so on. These constitute the backbone of his hermeneutics. One could conclude from all these "the contemporaneity of understanding", "the dependence of the text on the understanding of the interpreter and his external informatio," and "the forgetting of the intention of the author and the speaker".

¹² Jurgen Habermas was born in 1929. He was regarded as the most influential social philosopher in the 1970s. He started his first debate with Gadamer with the compilation in 1967. In his critical survey of modern research in the fields of sociology and social theory he criticized and examined the science of hermeneutics. In his sociological research, Habermas believes that hermeneutics has the power to criticize the non-contemplative characteristic of the positivistic theory of social sciences. However, despite such support he opposes and criticizes the science of hermeneutics in many cases. He believes that Gadamer's inclination to relativism and

his excessive emphasis on the role of language is an issue subject to criticism and unacceptable. In his treatise "Rhetoric, Hermeneutic and Critique of Ideology" Gadamer responds to Habermas's criticism and complaints.

¹³ *The Philosophy of Hans- George Gadamer*, p.55.

¹⁴ *Truth and Method*, p.551; *The Philosophy of Hans- George Gadamer*, p.16.

¹⁵ *Validity in interpretation* P. 247.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 247.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.248-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.249.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.242.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.62.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.226.

²² *Ibid*, p.4.

²³ *Ibid*, p.214.

²⁴ *Ibid*. p.10.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

²⁶ *Truth and Method*, p.375.

²⁷ *Ibid*, P.370.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.235.

²⁹ *The critical circle* P.67. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.13.

³¹ *Validity in interpretation*, P.23.

³² *Ibid*, p.134.

³³ *Ibid*. P. 135.

³⁴ *Ibid*, PP. 245-246.

³⁵ *Truth and Method*, p.370.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.372-4.

³⁷ *Truth and Method*, p.271.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.333.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.272.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.337.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.261.

⁴² Couzens Hoy, David ,*The Critical Circle*, p. 67.

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- ⁴³ Bleicher, Josef, *Contemporary hermeneutics*, P.114.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid,p.112.
- ⁴⁵ *The Critical Circle* ,P. 68.
- ⁴⁶ Georgia Warnke, Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and reason*, Polity press, Reprinted, 1994, P.30.
- ⁴⁷Gadamer, H.G., *The idea of good in platonic-Aristotalion philosophy*, Yale university press, 1986, P.19.
- ⁴⁸ Georgia Warnke, Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and reason*, op. cit, PP. 68-9
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 69.
- ⁵⁰ *Validity in interpretation*, PP. 249-250.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, P. 301.
- ⁵² Ibid, PP. 300-301.
- ⁵³ Ibid, PP. 304-305.
- ⁵⁴ Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and reason*, P. 36.
- ⁵⁵ *Truth and method*, P. 306.
- ⁵⁶ *Validity in interpretation*, PP. 251-253.
- ⁵⁷ *Truth and Method*, P. 242.
- ⁵⁸ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, P.182.
- ⁵⁹ James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other*, State University of New York press, 1997, PP. 133-138.
- ⁶⁰Ahmadi, Babak , *Structure and Hermeneutics*, Gam-e Now Publications, Tehran, 2001.
- ⁶¹ Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell, 1962, P.193.
- ⁶² *Truth and Method*, P.440.
- ⁶³ Palmer, Richard E, *Hermeneutics*, P. 182.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ *Validity in interpretation*, PP. 257, 264.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, P.44.
- ⁶⁷Gadamer, Gepriga Warnke, *Hermeneutics, tradition and reason*, op. cit. PP. 44-45.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, PP. 45-46.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid, PP. 47-48.
- ⁷⁰ Taqipour, *Symbol and Symbolic Stories in Persian Literature*, pp. 128-130.
- ⁷¹*Structure and Interpretation of Text*, Vol. II, pp. 508-509.

⁷²schleiermacher, F.D.E. , *Hermeneutique*, op. cit. p. 59.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 188, 67.

⁷⁴Dilthey, M. Ermarth Wilhelm , *The Critique of Historical Reason*, Chicago University Press, 1978.

⁷⁵Gadamer, H.G. , *Truth and Method*, op., cit., p. 359.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 370-75.

⁷⁷Ricoeur, Paul, *The Conflict of Interpretation, Essays in Hermeneutics*, Northwestern U P: Evanston 1974, pp. 284-89.

⁷⁸Ricoeur, Paul , *Life in the World of Text*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ *The Aims of Interpretation*, 1976, pp. 214, 242.

⁸⁰Hirsch, E.D. , *Validity in Interpretation*, op, cit., p. 249.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 247.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 248-9.

⁸³ Hirsch ,E.D. , *The Aims of Interpretation*, p. 242.

⁸⁴ *validity in interpretation*, P. 242.

⁸⁵ Ibid, P.46.

⁸⁶ Ibid, PP.2,3.

⁸⁷ Ibid, P.63.

⁸⁸ ibid, P.246.

⁸⁹ Ibid P.135.

⁹⁰ *Truth and method*, P. 308.

⁹¹ *validity in interpretation* P. 140,143.

⁹² Ibid, P.143.

⁹³ Ibid, P.203.

⁹⁴ Ibid,P.247.

Chapter Five: the most prominent features of *Al-Mizan*

5.1. Introduction

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai was born in Tabriz A.H. (lunar) 1321 or A.H. (solar) 1282, (A.D. 1903)¹ into a family of descendants of the Holy prophet, which for fourteen generations has produced outstanding Islamic scholars.² His education starts with 6 years at primary school and then 8 years of religious study, both in Tabriz his birthplace. Then in 1925 (1304 H.S) for further religious study, he goes to Najaf in Iraq.³ For years he studies different subjects in the presence of the masters whose specialities were unparalleled and incomparable. The effect of having such eminent masters causes a turning point in Allameh Tabatabai's life when his talent begins to thrive and he eventually achieves a top degree in spiritual and religious study and conquers the pinnacles of knowledge.⁴

During his stay in Najaf, Allameh Tabatabai makes the most of his great masters' teachings and gains a profound mastery in the fields of Theology and its principles, Gnostics, Philosophy, *Tafsir* (Interpretation), Mathematics and some mystical science.

He then returns to his home town, Tabriz and resides there for the next 10 years pursuing his educational activities and also writes several treatises on Philosophy for those who are interested in the subject.

Allameh Tabatabai finally decides to migrate to the holy town of Qom for further research and teaching. A short while after his arrival in Qom, he finds out that in the Hozeh Elmieh (the Seminary), the subjects of Philosophy and *Tafsir* (Interpretation) are not part of the syllabus and he recognises that the students need to have an understanding of these subjects, so he starts teaching them. This new initiative gradually leads to his establishing a congress of great scholars with the aim of resisting any uneasiness about philosophy and the trend towards atheism which had an attraction for Iranian youth.⁵

During his life Allameh Tabatabai lectured to many students in many branches of religious study, particularly in the fields of Philosophy and Tafsir, and compiled tens of books and articles among which the *Tafsir al Mizan* enjoys outstanding fame in religious centers throughout the world.

Tafsir al Mizan is in a number of volumes and deals with a diversity of subjects. It adopts a particular style of Tafsir: expressions of opinions and their comparisons and criticism, also the method of reasoning and the research, makes this book not only stand out among Allameh Tabatabai's works, but is also unique from the aspect of interpretation, Philosophy and Gnostics.⁶

5.2. The most important features of *Al-Mizan*

The valuable interpretative work *al-Mizan* stand the most outstanding and comprehensive interpretative work of the Shiite community. The validity of this claim will be illustrated through an outline of the main principles and their distinctive features. Thus there is an attempt here to explain some of the most significant features of *al-Mizan*.

5.2.1. Focus on Richness in Interpreting the Verses

Needless to say, the work of *al-Mizan* is an orderly process which takes the Qur'an from the beginning till the end and is composed according to the method of Qur'anic interpretation. Tabatabai believes that Qur'anic verses have all come from the same source and that they are a composite of one statement so that changing the order of some verses will not result in any kind of change in the general meaning. On the contrary, the whole Qur'an becomes like a single statement. Tabatabai has embarked on interpreting the verses with this insight in mind. He postulates that every Qur'anic verse can be an evidence or interpreter for other verses and sentences. If there is any brevity and vagueness in terms of meaning in some verses they will be dissolved and the meaning will be clear through observation and correspondence with other verses. Thus through this method the meaning of verses is obtained from the very Qur'anic verses. Therefore, other perceptions are assessed through this method. At the same time, the meaning is judged whether it corresponds to the Qur'an.

Although other interpreters based on their own intellectual and scientific inclination have selected a special method from among various ones (like traditional, theological, philosophical, jurisprudential and moral methods), Tabatabai attempts to base his interpretation not on his scientific and intellectual inclinations but on the relationship between verses in terms of their sense.

This vast trust and dependence on the Qur'an for understanding and interpreting its verses might be denied by other methods especially those of the partisans of tradition and introduced as personal interpretation. But Tabatabai has refused this fancy and stated:

Interpretation of verses through pondering on them, paying attention to other verses and using *hadiths* is a fundamental method we have resorted to, noticed in the interpretation of the Prophet and Ahl Al-Bayt. It should be noted that what is mentioned in the prophetic *hadith* in rejecting interpretation does not include the Qur'an by the Qur'an. Since in this method, it is the Qur'an that shows its conceptual aspects of its verses and not the individual idea of the interpreter.⁷

However, the best way for identifying the efficiency of the method is to study samples that you can find in every part of *al-Mizan*. Here we merely refer to one summarized example.

Allameh Tabatabai discusses sura 2: 213 in terms of the creation of man and thus prepares a general outline of the emergence and life of man from the beginning till the end. Those who are familiar with the Qur'an know very well that the subject of anthropology from the viewpoint of revelation has not been continuously treated in any of the Qur'anic verses and *surahs*. Rather in each verse or *surah* an aspect of life with its aims, the beginning and end of human life is mentioned.

What Tabatabai has done according to this viewpoint is significant in two ways:

The principle of a comprehensive and constant look at the verses to achieve a general plan of human life and death.

2. The way verses are selected and the discovery of their relationship to each other.

In this research, he studies a number of larger circles in an interconnected chain. In the circle of each chain topics are treated in detail.

The larger chain of discussion includes:

The creation of mankind on earth.

The existential composure of man and his basic elements.

The significance of self-consciousness and understanding in human life.

The talents and grounds for the authority of man.

The roots of differences in human communities.

Areas of human demands in law and revelation.

Basic achievements of religion for mankind.

Life in the hereafter, where one would enjoy the rewards of one's achievements.

Tabatabai has responded to several questions through these topics. He has also introduced precise and delicate concepts about the coherence of verses for those who carry out research on the Qur'an. This indicates his Qur'anic thinking faculty, scientific power and craftsmanship.

He introduces a topic about man's creation focusing on *surah* 2: 213. He reminds us that the human race is independent, not born of another race, supported by *surah al-Hojarat*: 13: "O mankind, we have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes..." Then he refers to *surah al-A'raf*:189: "It is He who created you out of one living soul, and made of him his spouse..."

Tabatabai extends his look and refers to the two material and divine dimensions. He makes use of *surah al-Mo'minoun*: 12-16 and *surah al-Sad*: 72 to remind us of the material development of the human shape and adding the spirit to the body.

* The physical body with the divine gift – spirit – prepares the ground for education and understanding. (96:5)

* Man, at the time of birth, has no knowledge whatsoever. Then he begins to gain knowledge through sensual and perceptive tools. (16: 78)

* In the light of knowledge, man ascends and becomes of value. (2: 31)

* Because of this value, all earthly facilities serve him. (2: 29)

* Not only earth but also whatever exists in heaven are at the service of human interest and use. (45: 12)

* Here, man on the one hand, and all natures including all its parts, on the other hand, follow an aim according to the program. The aim is specified by God, the Creator of all. (20: 50)

* Also in the inward field, man observes a calculated system, an inclination to both debauchery and piety. (91: 7)

* Human beings, facing antithetical forces inside and various phenomena and signs outside, were a single nation at the advent of their history. Later, after the unity there was difference and variety. (10: 19)

* Were it not for the Divine kindness and His guidance through prophets, human beings would have been different and misunderstandings would have arisen. (11: 119)

* One major program of the prophets is to judge justly among people and eliminate the roots of differences. (2: 213)

* Real human life is guaranteed in the light of the teachings of the prophets. (8: 24)

* Those who do not follow the teachings of the prophet will be in darkness, like the blind. (6: 123)

Tabatabai continues his comments in this field and traces the evolution of human life.⁸ Here the researcher merely intends to show how he would use different verses for a full and coherent illustration of a single subject.

5.2.2. Subjectwise Study of Interpretation of Verses on Necessary Grounds

Based on his chosen interpretative method of emphasizing Qur'anic verses and the use of the overall message of verses, Tabatabai has greatly used the subject-wise method for understanding the interpretative content of the Qur'an. So *al-Mizan* might be called an order-subject interpretation. According to the idea that true interpretation is a perception of the Holy Qur'an obtained by contemplating the verses and annexing some verses to others, he has used the subject method in a clear way along with an interpretation of verses in order and an analytical understanding of them. Wherever he treated separate verse he would explain it justly and open up new horizons to the reader's mind. At the same time, he would organize a group of verses and examine the deeper meaning as well as the surrounding of the subject to establish the content relationship and conceptual connection among verses.

However, Tabatabai's method in his interpretation of the verses is through composing subject webs of the logical structure of the verses to eliminate any doubts of the subject content and introduce organized material. Even in this one notices that certain verses are given a major role without a common subject in the text. But they are identified according to the general style of the Qur'an and located in the subject web.

The introduction to the results of assessing the Qur'anic viewpoint through human experiences is another instance when externalism and paying attention to the critical points, the zenith and nadir of human thought have played a role in different ideological, intellectual and social aspects in the subject-wise study of the Qur'an and achieved revelational results.

He has organized and introduced the Qur'an's historical narratives in an organized way for study and judgment through the subject-wise study according to order of revelation and the conceptual bond of each verse and, ultimately, reminds us of the points resulting from further research and close study. For example, the following is what he writes about the story of the nation of Lot:

The statement that faith and Islam existed only in Lot's house and that as punishment the whole city of Lot was raided are all evidence that first, the whole nation of Lot were atheist; second, fornication had spread, not

merely among the male population. In such cases, if women were not fornicating, as Lot invited his nation to follow the path of nature and the tradition of natural creation, some women would have followed him, trusted him and reached salvation.⁹

However, there are independent debates and topics in every corner of *al-Mizan* introduced to solve the intellectual, cultural and social problems alluded to in the verses, while subject-wise interpretation has been introduced in order to raise external questions on the Qur'an.

Aal-Mizan promoted the approach of subject-wise interpretation of the Qur'an. It also resulted in the fact that Qur'anic research, after Tabatabai, inclined towards subject-wise interpretation. Researchers, especially those writing in Farsi, became interested in interpretation of this kind precisely after *al-Mizan* appeared during the second half of the fourteenth century.

5.2.3. Considering Style ¹⁰When Understanding and Interpreting Verses

Style according to literary men is how sentences are structured and what is the particular order of the words. Sometimes a sentence is meaningful, in a way different from the meaning of the words and the sentence. Style with its verbal and figurative significance could affect the meaning of the words and verses have a special position in *al-Mizan*. The writer has used this in various interpretative waygrounds. In some cases, style is used for discovering the meaning of the verses, clarifying the meaning of the words, accepting or refuting the traditions as well as criticizing and examining statements and theories of interpreters.

Furthermore, in distinguishing between Meccan and Medinan verses - keeping in mind that at the time of the Holy Prophet's Hijra (emigration from Mecca to Medina), style was the basis for distinguishing Meccan from Medinan verses - content was treated and style focused on. Based on style as well as the correspondence of the content of the verses with the happenings in Mecca or Medina, the verses are labelled either Meccan or Medinan.

For example, at the beginning of the interpretation of *surah al-Ahzab*, while reminding us of the meaning, Tabatabai states the following about whether the *surah*

is Meccan or Medinan: "The struggle of the sura's verses confirms the traditions and narrations showing that the surah is Medinan".¹¹

There are many such cases in *al-Mizan*, where substantiation through the style of verses shows whether they are Meccan or Medinan.

Tabatabai even puts forward the reason for the revelations of some verses through the style in which they are written. The following verse is one such instance: "O Prophet, fear God, and obey not the unbelievers and the hypocrites. God is All-knowing, All-wise."¹²

He writes:

Since the verse is in a negative style the atheists have asked the Prophet about the matter. The hypocrites also have insistently asked him to accept the suggestion made by the atheists. Therefore, due to the style of the verse, the traditions about the revelation of the verse are accepted. That group of traditions explains that some of the heads of the Quraish, after Ohod War, came to the Prophet and asked him not to pay any attention their idolatry. In turn, they would not interfere with his monotheism. Thus this verse and the one that follows were revealed and prevented the Prophet from following them.¹³

Furthermore, the style of the verse corresponds to the end of the verse, which incorporates two of the (ninety-nine) glorious names of God (the Omniscient and the Wise). Also, the correspondence of the verse to the following verses becomes clear.¹⁴

It should be mentioned that the use of style in the verses for understanding the Qur'an is very sensitive and use is made of reiterated sentences. For example, about the reiterated Qur'anic statements "ان الله على كل شى قدير" or "و توكل على الله" and the like, there has been only one interpretation of it. In other instances, there have either been no interpretations or referral has been made to the very first case. But regarding the style of the verses in *al-Mizan*, for each sentence we find not only the general meaning and interpretation of the sentence but also another sense.

Therefore, throughout *al-Mizan*, for understanding the intent of the Qur'an and comprehending the verses, the style of the verses and the Qur'anic sentences used together with the hidden secrets of the verses are clarified. The reiterated Qur'anic verses and sentences are no more repetitive and clichéd, while the reader of interpretation becomes familiar with the spirit and liveliness of the meaning of the Qur'an. his method is rarely used in other interpretations.

In short, Tabatabai has used the style of the holy verses for expressing vocabulary, combination of verses, preference of Recitation, criticism of *hadiths*, order of revelation of verses, whether the verses are Meccan or Medinan, order of *surahs*, refutation of different interpretative ideas, preference of interpretative sayings, criticism of some literary issues, criticism of theological topics, and so on.

5.2.4. Evaluation for Reason in Understanding the Teachings of Revelation

One obvious feature of *al-Mizan* is the reliance on reason in interpretation. He reminds us that the Qur'an calls for reasoning, thinking and using rational methods and emphasizes thinking about the truth. He postulates that inclination towards reason leads to religiousness.¹⁵ Thus the writer of *al-Mizan*, takes a firm and a highly critical stance confronting the Israelites and the superstition of People of the Book which has penetrated these interpretative, doctrinal and historical texts. He also criticizes extreme optimism towards traditions and the unquestionable acceptance of narrations.

In the introduction to *al-Mizan*, after remembering the interpretative method of the traditionists, and that they merely use statements by the Companions and Followers for comprehending the verses, he writes:

The traditionists have chosen a wrong way since in this method, reason and thought are dysfunctional and, in fact, they have said: 'we have no right to use reason and rationality in comprehending Qur'anic verses: the only thing to do is to check what someone like ibn Abbas has said in his narration.' Nevertheless, the Holy Qur'an has not ruled out reason. It is not logical to rule it out. It is through reason that the validity of the Qur'an and its divinity has been substantiated.¹⁶

Tabatabai then uses reason extensively in interpreting the Qur'an, looking at the ambiguous verses and especially interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an.

5.2.5. Using Traditions without Going to Extremes

Some believe that reliance on *hadiths* in interpretation of the Qur'an is the only correct and well-marked path. But emphasizing the validity of statements of the Prophet and Imams, Tabatabai matches the doubtful *hadiths* with the Qur'an and uses the traditions matching the verses for confirmation and support. He asserts:

According to the Qur'an, statements by the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt are the authority in interpreting Qur'anic verses. This authority is clear about oral statements, the method of the Prophet and Ahl al-Bayt and in the histories and narrations with a definite origin that narrate his statements. But narrations unlike this, the so-called single narration, have their authority debated among Muslims, and it depends on the viewpoint the one who practices interpretation. The majority of Sunnis act according to the single narration, called a "genuine" tradition by them. Among Shiites the accepted thing in the science of fundamentals is the fact that once a single narration is accepted it will be the only authority in religious injunctions.¹⁷

Therefore, Allameh Tabatabai recognizes the Qur'an as a criterion for identification and the basis for teaching. He attempts to prove the authority of statements by the Prophets and Imams by means of the Qur'an. Therefore, how is it possible that the authority of the appearance of the Prophet and Imams statements. All in all, attention should be paid to the fact that Tabatabai has no doubt that the Prophet and the Imams are responsible for explaining the details of religious laws and defining the unsaid injunctions in the appearance of the Qur'an. Thus he asserts:

The Prophet clarifies the details and explanations of religion and is the divine teacher of the Holy Qur'an. According to the *Thaqalain hadith*, he appointed the Imams to replace him. This does not contradict the personal use they made of the true teachers to comprehend the intent of the Holy Qur'an through the verses as they appeared.¹⁸

Tabatabai uses tradition in documentation when he is sure. The group of single narrations that he is sure of but with no evidence is authority only in practical injunctions, yet in other cases they can be used merely for confirming the constituents of a verse. This happens when the narrations correspond to the meaning of the verse; otherwise, they would be put aside.¹⁹

5.2.6. Introducing Scientific and Social Debates Corresponding to Verses

Another feature of *al-Mizan* is the introduction of various social, historical and philosophical issues. Tabatabai has studied the serious and outstanding contemporary issues according to the principles of the Qur'an. Thus he has given his interpretation an active and constructive presence in the lives of individuals and society in the Islamic community because he believes that the Qur'an has authority in all aspects of human life. It also teaches construction and creativity. He states s:

The Holy Qur'an with its legislative logic and method has considered all aspects of human life without any conditions ... Then the Qur'an has a relationship with all sciences and facilities of human life; it invites man to be prudent and thoughtful. It mobilizes him to science and invites him to utilise whatever is effective for the prosperity of human social life such as morals, religious laws, rights, social injunctions, and so on.²⁰

A major part of *al-Mizan* is devoted to the introduction of various intellectual, cultural and social issues such as philosophical and theological ones, the philosophy of prophethood, and its role in human development and life, a comparative study of the teachings of revealed relations, man and society, property and its framework, slavery and its history in human communities, legitimacy of temporary marriage, polygamy, lex talionis (retaliation or *qisas*), inheritance, and so on.

Therefore, these very features led to a new field in Shiite interpretation. There was a new look at Qur'anic verses.

5.3. The Reality of *Ta'vil* and its Features

The subject of *Ta'vil* of the revealed verses has a long history of serious treatment. From a wider viewpoint we might say that the subject of hermeneutics for the holy texts and books was discussed even prior to the birth of Christ

In the traditional arena of interpreting the Holy Book terms like “intent,” “hidden meaning”, “clear and comprehensible meaning of religious texts” as well as “polysemy of revelation” are mentioned as components of hermeneutics.

The idea that holy texts have a single, final and holy meaning has been repeated many times in Jewish and Christian hermeneutics. When this single meaning was inaccessible, many scholars began to believe in the possibility of numerous meanings for hermeneutic interpreters. On the other hand, many scholars of the Middle Ages and philosophers of the Renaissance period emphasized the existence of a single and final meaning for every text – and not merely religious texts. Unlike the case of holy texts it was known as accessible. After the Renaissance, philosophical thought reiterated this idea in different ways. Even philosophers like Spinoza, who had frozen his philosophical ideas from “restrictions of old beliefs”, used to reiterate this prejudiced belief in this respect. He wrote in the seventh chapter of his theological political treatise entitled *Hermeneutics of Holy Texts* that hermeneutics is meant for finding the single meaning of every text and that the meaning of every sentence is the truths about that sentence.²¹ And that hermeneutics is research about the true meaning of the text.²² Spinoza emphasized that his opinion is different from ibn Maymoun's. The latter believes that every section of the Holy Book has different meaning from other sections and that we can never trust the meaning we get through hermeneutics.²³ First Spinoza criticized the practical result of this opinion. He wrote: “Whenever the meaning of the Holy Book is supposed to be the subject of sound research, a common man who has no time and knowledge for such research will not understand it. Then they would follow the interpretation by philosophers and scholars. This would ultimately lead to earthly powers of two groups. Spinoza asserts that the public should not follow the interpreters since the meaning of the holy texts is simple and every one may comprehend it. ²⁴Everyone has this right and power to make judgments and clarify religious patterns.²⁵

Despite the difference in viewpoints, there is a common belief among traditional interpreters of People of the Book that religious texts represent both the truth and facts but some interpreters depend on logical positivism; the theory of linguistic interpretation in the twentieth century opposed this belief and introduced the idea that religious teaching lack the characteristic of representing facts.

When those of the “Vienna Circle” (the scientific-philosophical association of the 1930s) became active with the introduction of the principle of “the possibility of realization”, all metaphysical sentences, morals and theology were introduced as lacking meaning, real significance and facts. Because according to this principle only those experimental predicates, which are realized through sensual experience, are meaningful.²⁶ Then religious predicates are nonsensical and meaningless. They are neither true nor false.²⁷ Issues like laughter have an expressive role and are not reactionary or they are oratory expressions for making one or preventing one from doing something.²⁸ According to language interpreters too, religious predicates have no role in facts and stories. Thus they are neither true nor false. But they are responsible for introducing us to a special way of life.²⁹

The present researcher mentioned some attitudes and views about hermeneutics of the holy books. However, the Holy Qur'an itself is the first source that draws attention to *Ta'wil*: “But they have cried lies to that whereof they comprehended not the knowledge, and whose interpretation has not yet come to them.³⁰...And none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge...”³¹

On the other hand, the Prophet, the Ahl al-Bayt and Companion interpreters have emphasized the necessity of *Ta'wil* for the Qur'an. The Prophet has been quoted about ibn Abbas (a Companion): “O God! Grant him the deep understanding of religion and the knowledge of interpretation!”³² Imam Baqir (AS), the fifth Shiite Imam, says in a narration: “Truly the Prophet is the most virtuous among those firmly rooted in knowledge since he knows whatever was revealed to him through *Ta'wil* and revelations.”³³

Such texts, which introduce being rooted in knowledge as an agent for achieving the *Ta'wil* of the Qur'an, also have a message that prescribes the gaining of valuable permanent knowledge, thus easing the way towards essential interpretation.

Otherwise a wrong understanding and incorrect interpretation of the misguided would misinform people. Here is a warning from the text of the Qur'an:

As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge...³⁴

All narrations about various layers of hidden and half-hidden meaning, in fact, remind us of the recommendation that we should not be content with the surface and literary meaning of the verses; otherwise, we could be deprived of the major part of the guidance of revelation and the precise divine intent.

Nevertheless, Shiite scholars emphasize *Ta'wil*. As an instance, the following is a statement by Sayyed Hyder Amoli, a great Shiite interpreter and mystic :

The Qur'an is the divine command revealed to prophets and people to act according to all of its orders and secrets... When one becomes content with a part of it or its interpretation and ignores *Ta'wil*, it is possible that his deduction and what is ignored mismatch. Therefore, it is necessary for all to practice both interpretation and *Ta'wil* in order to reach the deepest sevenfold layers.³⁵

5.3.1. The features of *Ta'wil*³⁶

Basically, considering the diction, the customary law of the Qur'an, the practice of the Prophet in order to understand the truth about interpretation, *Ta'wil* may be defined as truths about the divine Will that is extremely profound, beyond the senses, that guides and yet is hidden in forms of words and Qur'anic verses. For a comprehensive and relative understanding depends on a meaningful prudence corresponding to the expressive and exclusive Qur'anic structure as well as the special rational scientific and spiritual qualifications of the interpreter.

Doubtless, Qur'anic truths might be studied in the two sections of reports and legislation. Epistemological news and reports whose major fields include theology, understanding the abstract, naturology, anthropology and eschatology have a major share in the Qur'an. It attempts to introduce to mankind the endless and various

truths of existence in order to pave the way for his epistemological perfection. The Qur'an in terms of legislation – including social regulations, moral orders and devotional injunctions – talks about a profound influence manifested in either epistemological perfection accompanied by external happiness or an ignorance together with irreparable and eternal damage for mankind. In other words, it talks about things to do and things not to do. Human attention in this regard might have extremely positive or negative consequences.

The Qur'an has made a claim, as it has left nothing unsaid. Within a limited textual frame, it has introduced a limitless load of meaning:

“And we have sent down on thee the Book making clear everything, and as guidance and a mercy, and as good tidings to those who surrender.”³⁷

Despite the absence of any limit to the universe and the positive and negative reflection of the contact between man and the divine teachings, all that is included in the reports and legislation is ultimately divine. The major difference between the divine and human statement is that man disregards many aspects and effects of his statement. On the other hand there is God, who is conscious of everything and whose Will and attention is present in all corners and aspects of meaning. It is impossible to find a corner or effect not included in the divine Will that comprises the truth of *Ta'wil* profoundly in every word and verse.

Of course, the interpretation of the term *Ta'wil* as regards the truth of the Divine Will is a discussion introduced in the narrations and statements of early and contemporary interpreters one way or the other. Imam Sadiq (AS) makes the following statement about inessential *Ta'wil*:

“The only reason for destroying people as regards ambiguous verses is that they have not realized its meaning and truth and devised an interpretation for it.”³⁸

As an attempt to explain the verse and the reason why atheists denied the Qur'an,³⁹ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi who is one of the greatest Sunni interpreters writes:

As they found out that the Qur'an includes issues whose philosophy and truth are unknown to them, they denied it. Thus since they were not familiar with the Divine Secrets and analyzed the problems in terms of

familiar findings of the world of sense, they ignored their philosophy and *Ta'wil* and resorted to refutation and ignorance. So the statement, “... كذبوا بما...” shows that they were unfamiliar with the issues while the statement “و لم يا تهم...” refers to the fact that they did not seriously go after understanding the secrets.⁴⁰

Likewise, among Shiite and Sunni interpreters some recognize the achievement of the truth of the Divine Will of the verses is something lost to those involved in *Ta'wil*. The difference is that some would consider *Ta'wil* as another interpretation of the truth of the divine Will. Others consider *Ta'wil* as an effort to understand the truth.

Keeping in mind the definition for *Ta'wil*, the following are some of the most important characteristics of *Ta'wil*.

5.3.1.1. It can be learned

What can be learned from the Prophet and Imams is teachable *Ta'wil* and it could be learned not only by the Prophet and Imams and their distinguished disciples but also by the common people.⁴¹

Undoubtedly, a criterion of *Ta'wil* is that it can be learned. As *Ta'wil* is at the service of understanding the meaning from the verbal framework, all people are asked to learn that meaning. The tools should be available for teaching the Qur'an. Attempting to clarify the role of the Prophet as a teacher of the Qur'an, Tabatabai asserts:

The role of the Prophet is just teaching the Book... One cannot say that teaching is guidance for understanding issues impossible to learn without teaching, since teaching is easing the way and bringing the destination closer and not creating a path and making a destination... This is a fact emphasized by the two following verses: We have sent down to thee the Remembrance that thou mayest make clear to mankind what was sent down to them.⁴² Also: And to teach them the Book and the Wisdom.⁴³ According to these verses, the Prophet has merely expressed something signified by the Book and which is accessible by mankind. God has meant to make man understand it through his language not through means not understandable to man.⁴⁴

The possibility of learning *Ta'wil* and its attribution to the Qur'an explain that there is a relationship between *Ta'wil* and the verbal aspect that is considered as the source of significance and guidance for the verbal aspect. Furthermore, this case is evidence of the tradition of the Prophet and Imams. Along with the emphasis on the wealth of the Qur'an, tradition insists that all the teaching of the Qur'an is attainable through significance. Imam Sadiq (AS), the sixth Shiite Imam, asserts in a narration: "There is no problem between two people unless there is a solution for it in the book."⁴⁵

Imam Baqir (AS,) the fifth Shiite Imam, states: "Whatever the nation needs, from now till the day of resurrection, God has revealed it in His book and stated it to His Prophet."⁴⁶

5.3.1.2. Endless Depth

Endless depth is another characteristic of *Ta'wil* mentioned in *hadiths* too. With such a characteristic, constant flowering and response to new demands, at any time, are provable for the Qur'an.

On this subject Imam Ali (A.S) has said:

"The Qur'an has a beautiful outward aspect and a profound inward aspect. Its wonders never end while the unsaid and the unknown therein are never exhausted".⁴⁷

It is clear what is meant by the outward form of the Qur'an according to the one narrations in the Qur'an's aesthetic aspect. That is words and expressions of the Holy Qur'an have been arranged in the best possible way and thus created the most beautiful composite. The superb form has surprised even famous Arab poets and orators. But what is meant by the inward aspect is the meaning and intention meant by God for these verses. In other words, what is meant by the outward aspect is the meaning obtained through style, diction and conditions of revelation which inevitably has a limited meaning. But what is meant by the inward aspect is the meaning beyond the framework of primary concepts and subjects. Rather it incorporates elevated intentions whose various layers could be accessed only through hermeneutics and pondering on verses.

5.3.1.3. It can be applied to all Qur'anic verses

The *hadiths* that have reached us from the Prophet and Imams allude to the fact that *Ta'wil* could be applied to all parts of the Qur'an. The arena of *Ta'wil* covers the whole Qur'an. Thus the Prophet states: "The Qur'an is revealed on seven letters each having an outward and an inward".⁴⁸ On another occasion the Prophet states: "The Qur'an is revealed in seven letters, each verse having an outward and an inward."⁴⁹

Imam Ali (AS) on this subject declares : "There is an interpretation for every letter in the Qur'an."⁵⁰

Moreover, a person called Fodhail asked about the narration: There is an outward and inward aspect for every verse. Here is Imam Baqir's response: "Its outward aspect is its descent while its inward aspect is its *Ta'wil* interpretation."⁵¹ So it is clear that all Qur'anic verses have *Ta'wil* interpretation.

Therefore, individual verses can be hermeneutically interpreted while none of the meanings of the seven kinds (mentioned above) might be obtained and summed up in the surface and literary meaning. It is also probable that, in fact, the aim of *Ta'wil* as regards the Qur'an and every letter of its seven letters is logically this matter of *Ta'wil* and not something separate which does not correspond to the *Ta'wil* interpretation of Qur'anic verses.

5.3.2. Philosophy of *Ta'wil* in the Qur'an

Nevertheless, in *Ta'wil*, outward understanding and the interpretation of revelation that is individual and beyond individual cases, both are necessary. Doubtless, the Qur'an with its limited pages, its limited number of verses and words about the limitless objective and unrealizable facts, communicates with man whose understanding is chained by the senses in order to develop his perspective and understanding.

Therefore, the Qur'an's commitment to conciseness and man's captivity by his own senses are the two principle problems of expressing unfamiliar and limitless truths in the Qur'an.

For the purpose of providing immunity for the teaching of revelation when confronted with these two problems, the principle of "multifunction of the words and verses" has been recognized as the basis for explaining the truth of the Divine Will. In other words, every Qur'anic word or verse has a power of significance and as many functions as the number of words and verses with which they have a semantic relationship.

That is to emphasize the point that in the organized system of Qur'anic teachings and the essential relationship between them, the reciprocal role of words and verses in clarifying the meaning is provable. It plays a considerable role in understanding one truth of the Divine Will.

On this subject two sections in Allameh Tabatabai's statements are outstanding:

"What is understood from a verse according to the rules of relevant sciences is not enough without paying attention to and studying all relevant verses for clarifying the intention."⁵²

"This is one of the Qur'an's wonders that every verse is a guide. When another verse is rightly used to clarify the meaning of another verse, it would introduce another truth. Then the third verse would confirm the truth..⁵³

For example the word "تقوى (piety)," which has been used in the verses in various ways, is connected semantically to many verses and words. In each constituency, it reveals a new aspect of the Divine Will. Then it makes the meaning more profound and comprehensive. After discovering the clarifying mutual relationship between "piety" and another word, say "صبر (patience)," for understanding other aspects of the term "piety," one may study words and verses connected semantically to the term "patience".

Therefore, thanks to the special structure and system of the Qur'an, the ground is prepared for realizing the truth of the Divine Will from every individual subject and verse. Moreover, since man is chained to the senses, he is given the chance to study the outward aspects connected to time, place, reason of revelation and style which are sensual reasons, to understand the revelation, its manifestation and truth. This can be used as a path to reach other layers of the truth of the Divine Will.

¹ Tabatabai, Seyyid Mohammad Hossein, *Shi'A*, Preface, Translated by Seyyid Hossein Nasr, Ansariyan Publications, P.22.

² Ibid. The title *Seyyid* in Allameh Tabatabai's name is itself an indication of his being a descendent of the prophet. In Persian the term *seyyid* is used exclusively in this sense while in the Arab world it is usually used as the equivalent of "gentleman" or "Mr".

³ Goli Zavareh, Gholamreza, *Jor'e haye jan bakhsh*, Entesharate Hozour, 1377, P.42.

⁴ Nafisi, Shadi, *Allameh Tabatabai va Hadith*, Sherkate Entesharate Elmi va Farhangi, P.76.

⁵ Tabatabai, Mohammad Hossein, *Osoule Falsafeh*, Introduction by Morteza Motahari, P.25/26.

⁶ *Allameh Tabatabai va Hadis*, P.86.

⁷ *The Qur'an in Islam*, p. 56.

⁸ *Al-Mizan*, vol.2, pp. 115-138.

⁹ *Al-Mizan*, vol.10, pp. 367-369.

¹⁰ Style is the very method and way of speech. (Khoury Shartuni, Said, *Aqrab al-Mawarid*, p.588.) This term is of interest to the scholars of the science of fundamentals and jurisprudence. Books of fundamentals have treated this subject in terms of its truth, evidence and scope. (Zarkashi, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, *Al-Borhan fi Uloom al-Qur'an*, pp.52-4.)

¹¹ *Al-Mizan*, vol.16, p.273.

¹² *Al-Qur'an*, 33:1.

¹³ *Al-Mizan*, vol.16, p.273.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Al-Mizan*, vol.1, p.431.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.9.

¹⁷ Tabatabai, Mohammad Hossein, *Qur'an and Islam*, p.61.

¹⁸ *Al-Mizan*, p.86.

¹⁹ *Al-Mizan*, vol.17, p.174.

²⁰ *Al-Mizan*, vol.III, p.271.

²¹ B. Spinoza, *Works*, R.H. Elwes [trans.], New York, 1951, p. 101.

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- ²² Ibid., p.106.
- ²³ Ibid., pp.114-5.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp.116-7.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p.119.
- ²⁶ Ian Barbur, *Science and Religion*, Baha' ud-DinKhorramshahi [trans.], Markaz-e Daneshgahi, p.152.
- ²⁷ Alfred Jones Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Manouchehr Bozorgmehr [trans.], Penguin, pp. 160, 167.
- ²⁸ *Science and Religion*, p.279.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.283.
- ³⁰ Al-Qur'an,10: 39.
- ³¹ Ibid,3: 7.
- ³² Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Mosnad Ahmad*, Beirut, Dar Sadr, vol.1, pp.266, 314.
- ³³ Majlisi,, Muhammad Baqir , *Bihar al-Anwar*, Al-Wafa' Institute, vol.98, p.81.
- ³⁴ Al-Qur'an,3:12.
- ³⁵ Amoli, Sayyed Hyder , *Tafsir Al-Mohidh Al-A'dham*, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, vol.1, pp.345-6.
- ³⁶ “*Ta’vil*” is an Arabic word derived from the word “*AVL*” which means, “Reference”. So on that basis we can translate “*Ta’vil*” to referring and returning a word to its main meaning. When a speaker express a hidden meaning of a word, then the orientation of the word is not clear at the outset and one think that the speaker has returned the word to its origin. This is called “*Ta’vil*”. Now therefore we can say that the discovery of the inner and inward meaning of a text is called “*Ta’vil*”. Some of the experts in interpretation of Koran believe that the terms “*Ta’vil*” and “Hermeneutic” are well suited to each other. For this reason the subject of “*Ta’vil*” is being discussed in this chapter bearing in mind the comparison study between the two terms of “*Tafseer*” and “*Ta’vil*”.*Tafseer* and *Ta’vil* are two tools to clear the understanding of Koran to the reader but they are different in methods.
- In “*Tafseer*” the concentration is to alleviate the ambiguities and complex meaning of the words of the verses, but in “*Ta’vil*” the whole verse is the target. Some of the Koranic verses are so vague and unclear that creates doubts in the mind of the reader, so the interpreter who can extract the meanings, proportionate to his/her ability, from the deep layers of the verses, implements the tool of “*Ta’vil*” to manifest the essence

meaning of the verse. We can then conclude that “*Ta’vil*” has higher rank to the “*Tafseer*” because you obtain a broader understanding from “*Ta’vil*” method and in a way these two have a Literal/ Metaphoric relation. Using the “*Ta’vil*” method requires some preconditions and criteria that need to be met by the interpreter without which, understanding “*Ta’vil*” cannot be claimed. For instance the first condition for enabling correct and reasonable “*Ta’vil*” is the existence of a close relation between inner and the outer meaning of the text. For example in chapter 55 verse 9 of the Koran we read: “So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance (scale)” If we take the word “*Scale*” without considering the context, then the metaphoric meaning will be the intention, (meaning a means of measuring or weighting things whether tangible or not) and the fact that scale in here wont be considered as some kind of apparatus. Some Koran interpreters translate the “*Scale*” to the “*Justice*” because it is to set the balance. Some other interpreters believe that the word scale is the “*Just Imam*” who acts righteous and just, after all it is the existence of the justice that holds the heaven and earth. There are other examples of this kind that the method of interpretation is considered as the “*Ta’vil*”.

³⁷ Al-Qur’an,16: 89.

³⁸ *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 90, p.3.

³⁹ Al-Qur’an,10:39.

⁴⁰ Fakhr Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir*, vol.17-18, p.98.

⁴¹ Ayyashi, Muhammad ibn Masood, *Al-Tafsir*, vol.1, p.29, Sayyed Razi, *Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 31, and al-Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.42, p.128.

⁴² Al-Qur’an,16: 44.

⁴³ Ibid,62: 2.

⁴⁴ Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussein, *al-Mizan*, vol.3, p.85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., vol.89, p.86.

⁴⁶ Ibid., vol.89, p.100.

⁴⁷ Sayyed Razi, *Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 133.

⁴⁸ Ameri, *Al-Ahkam fi Usool Al-Ahkam*, vol.1, p.287.

⁴⁹ Zarkashi, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, *Al-Borhan fi Uloom Al-Qur’an*, kind 33.

⁵⁰ Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, vol.33, p.155

⁵¹ Ibid., vol.89, p.98.

⁵² Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussein, *Al-Mizan*, vol.3, p. 76.

⁵³ Ibid., vol.2, p. 314.

Chapter Six: Understanding and interpretation

Concepts like understanding, interpretation, judgment, criticism, meaning and significance are frequently used in the hermeneutics of Hirsch. They are also employed by other hermeneutic scholars, both romantic and modern, in their speech. Such concepts are widely used in Islamic interpretative texts, particularly *Tafsir al-Mizan*. However, there are similarities and dissimilarities between the hermeneutics of Hirsch and *Tafsir al-Mizan* that need elaboration. First of all, let us have a brief look at the concepts in Islamic interpretative texts, the way and the extent to which they are used as well as the viewpoints of Tabatabai in order to clarify the points of difference and the similarities.

6.1. The Possibility of Understanding Qur'anic Verses

There are different viewpoints about whether it is possible to understand the Qur'an or not. Here are some of these viewpoints with Tabatabai's perspective appearing at the end:

1. Some interpreters, mostly traditionalists, claim that understanding the Qur'anic verses is possible only for those addressed by the Qur'an at the advent of Islam. Nobody else could possibly understand the Qur'anic verses. This group of interpreters has made reference to some traditions to prove their viewpoint.¹

A group of researchers into the Qur'an responded to this idea. If these traditions were well documented, they postulated, they would identify them as being about better understanding of the Qur'an, in the way it deserves. They also consider the external and internal Gnosticism, abrogating and abrogated by the Qur'an, and so on.²

2. The second viewpoint belongs to a group of researchers who make two sets of Qur'anic verses: both ambiguous verses and perspicacious verses of the Qur'an. According to this group of researchers the perspicacious verses are understandable to all Muslims but the ambiguous ones are subdivided into several groups: a) the verses that are understood by all, b) those understood by special people, and c) those not understandable by any one.³

3. According to the third viewpoint, many researchers and interpreters of the Qur'an believe that all Qur'anic verses including ambiguous verses and perspicacious verses are all understandable, thus, there is no verse in the Qur'an that cannot be understood.⁴ Allameh Tabatabai is the head of this group. As he writes:

There is not a single verse (out of more than six thousand) which is enigmatic, obscure or abstruse in its import; nor is there a single sentence that keeps the mind wandering in search of this meaning. After all, the Qur'an is admittedly the most eloquent speech, and it is one of the essential ingredients of eloquence that the talk should be free from obscurity and abstruseness. Even those verses that are counted among the "ambiguous" ones have no ambiguity in their meanings.⁵

Using intellectual and traditional reason to prove the understandability of the Holy Qur'an he states:

As we mentioned in the beginning, the Qur'an introduces itself as the guidance for the world (3:96); the manifest light (4:174), and the explanation of everything (16:89). But these people, contrary to those Qur'anic declarations, make it to be guided by extraneous factors, to be illuminated by some outside theories, and the Qur'an to be explained by something other than itself! What is that "something else"? What authority has it got? And if there is any difference in various explanations of a verse - and indeed there are most serious differences - which mediator should the Qur'an refer to?⁶

Allameh Tabatabaei regards this verse: "Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy" as the best evidence that all Qur'anic verses are understandable.⁷ And every one can comprehend the Holy Qur'an even by customary understanding.⁸ So, it is not wise to say that understanding the verses of the Qur'an is limited to a special group of people:

It clearly shows that Qur'anic knowledge may be acquired through meditation and contemplation, and that by this process the apparent discrepancy between verses disappears completely. Remember that this verse put a challenge to unbelievers: that they would not find any

discrepancy in the Qur'an if they pondered on it. And in this context they could not be advised to go to the Companions and their disciples if they wanted to understand its meaning; nay, even the advice to refer to the Prophet would have been irrelevant.⁹

The aim of Qur'anic verses is to be understood by all people, otherwise there would be a sort of contradiction with the verses and traditions that clearly signify that the Qur'an is understandable:

The Prophet teaches the people what the Qur'an itself says and the divine speech itself shows, and which the people themselves may understand even if it requires some meditation. It is not the Prophet's function to bestow on the verses such meanings as cannot be normally understood from those words. Such an explanation would not conform with the following Qur'anic declarations: *A book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an for a people who know (41:3)...and this is clear Arabic language (16:103)*

Then there are the traditions of the Prophet exhorting the Muslims to hold fast to the Qur'an and with its help to verify the traditions attributed to him. It necessarily follows that all that the prophet has said may be known from the Qur'an. Otherwise, he would not tell us to check with it all the sayings attributed to him. Now, if we say that understanding of the Qur'an depends on the Prophet's explanation, it would be a vicious circle. The Qur'an would be understood only if explained by the traditions, but the authenticity of the tradition could be established only if one understands the Qur'an.¹⁰

Finally Allameh Tabatabaei concludes:

The truth is that the highway to the understanding of the Qur'an is wide open; and the Divine speech itself leads one to its own understanding; it does not depend, for this purpose, on any other guide. It is a Book introduced by Allah as the guidance, the light and the clear explanation of everything.¹¹

6.2. Types of Understanding

Many interpreters and researchers of the Qur'an distinguish between two types of understanding: customary understanding and intellectual understanding. They believe that some of the divine knowledge that was revealed to the heart of the Prophet in the form of words, since it does not belong to the realm of sense, experience and the material, means that the laymen would experience only a superficial and material reading of it. They understand the verses in a way that contradicts the divine will. In contrast to this majority group, some others who are familiar with the principles and conditions of understanding the Qur'an have a different understanding of the verses. For example, as regards the verse "يد الله فوق" ¹² and "على العرش استوى" ¹³ there is a big difference between the customary and intellectual understanding of it. ¹⁴

According to the *Hashvie*, (anthropomorphists) and a group of the traditionalists this customary reading and understanding of the verses is enough evidence and does not need familiarity with the principles and conditions of interpretation and attention to contextual evidence, whether it is an attached contextual element or detached one; a reading accompanied by the sentence or a reading which is separated. ¹⁵

Allameh Tabatabai says:

I have constantly said that word outwardly is not limited to customary understanding, rather attached and detached contextual elements will play an important role in understanding the apparent meaning, specially in the Holy Qur'an whose verses depend on and confirm with each other. ¹⁶

He says regarding *Hashvieh* and *Mushabbihah*'s approach:

Some people have said: Allah has spoken to us in the Qur'an in the language with which we are familiar, with arrangements of words and phrases known to the speakers of this language. The apparent statements contain order and prohibition, promise and threat, stories and wisdom, sermon and arguments in a good manner. For understanding them, one is not obliged to learn logic, philosophy, and other such legacies of unbelievers, polytheists, and unjust persons. Allah has forbidden us to

befriend them, incline towards them, or follow their paths. The proper way for one who believes in Allah and his messenger is to adhere to the apparent meaning of religious statements, and stop at what a normal intellect understands from those words, without interpreting or overstepping them. This view is held by *al-Hashawiyyah* (those who believe in literal meanings of traditions), *al-Mushabbihah* (those who think that the person of Allah is similar to that of humans), and other traditionalists.¹⁷

Although Allameh Tabatabaei divides the understanding into customary and non-customary understanding, nevertheless he believes sometimes it is not possible to reach the real divine intentions in the Holy Qur'an:

Even in the literal meanings of the Qur'an we find ample evidence that relying on the habit and usage in explanation of the divine speech would cause confusion and anomaly. For example, Allah says: *nothing is like a likeness of him (42:11); visions comprehended him not, and he comprehends (all) visions; and he is the knower of subtitles, the aware (6:73); glory be to Him above what they ascribe (to Him) (23:91; 37:159)*. These verses manifestly show that what we are accustomed to cannot be ascribed to Allah. It was this reality that convinced many people that they should not explain the Qur'anic words by identifying them with their usual and common meanings. Going a step further, they sought the help of logical and philosophical arguments to avoid wrong deductions.¹⁸

6.3. Definition of Interpretation

The word interpretation has two meanings, one literal and one particular. Literally, interpretation means explanation, explication, elaboration and discovery.¹⁹ As a particular term, interpretation is defined as follows:

- a) Interpretation is a science about the qualities of the divine word in terms of the signification of its subject.²⁰
- b) It is a science about the Holy Qur'an in terms of the signification of God's intent within the framework of human intellect.²¹

c) Interpretation is a science through which understanding the Book that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (S), the expression of its meanings and the inference of its precepts become possible.²²

d) It is the clarification of the meaning of the Qur'anic verses and the elucidation of God on the basis of the verses. Thus one should not trust conjecture and supposition but should back the interpretation by some already validated evidence, intellectually and legally.²³

According to the above definition, interpretation is nothing but explaining and discovering the signified and literal meanings of verses and their combination of sentences and expressing the intent of a group of verses. Moreover, the meaning of interpretation, like other instances of lexical usage, indicates the quantitative and qualitative difference in discovering and expressing the signified and the lexical concepts of Qur'anic verses. Therefore, the interpretation of the Qur'an is true about clarifying each station of the meanings of the verses.²⁴

In other words, interpretation is where there is a sort of lexical ambiguity which causes ambiguity in meaning and signification of discourse and requires a lot of effort to eliminate ambiguity. This point is on the boundary between interpretation and translation. Translation is where we do not know the lexical meaning of the word. Of course, the problem will be easily overcome by consulting dictionaries. This is unlike interpretation in which, while the meaning of the word is clear, there still remains a halo of ambiguity.²⁵

Finally Allameh Tabatabai defines interpretation as follows:

Al-Tafsir (exegesis), that is, explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic verse, clarifying its import and finding out its significance, is one of the earliest academic activities in Islam.²⁶

He also says: "Interpretation expresses an author's intention and states the decisive and indubitable meaning of the word."²⁷

6.4. The Relation between Understanding and Interpretation

There is no independent and separate topic in Qur'anic interpretation called "relation between understanding and interpretation" or any similar topic which represents this topic. However, one could reach the instances, the usage of these two terms and the relation between them through the interpretative topics of researchers and interpreters of the Qur'an. Accordingly, Qur'anic works could be divided into two groups:

6.4.1. First Group

One could conclude from some writings that understanding and interpretation are two separate arenas. The arena of understanding concerns the meanings and concepts of Qur'anic verses; but the arena of interpretation goes beyond that: that is it includes God's meanings and intentions.

According to these writings, all those familiar with Arabic literature could understand the concepts and words of the verses and there is no verse which could not be understood. Tabatabai is a member of this group of interpreters and an advocate of the theory. He points out: "Among Qur'anic verses, being a few thousand, there is no single verse with a complicated meaning or is meaningless to hinder the mind of the reader who attempts an understanding. But how?! While the word of the Qur'an is the most eloquent, a condition for being eloquent is to eliminate any complexity and meaninglessness. To that extent the so-called ambiguous verses of the Qur'an also, like the abrogated verses and other verses, are fully understandable."²⁸

Nevertheless, the interpretation of verses relevant to the meanings and intentions of God could be achieved only by qualified interpreters. (According to this perspective, interpretation is not the key to understanding and one could understand the Qur'anic verses prior to any earlier interpretation).

This reading of the relationship between understanding and interpretation could also be concluded from the point of view of the group of interpreters who introduce interpretation as *Kashfol Qena'* ("removal of the mask"), since according to this

definition interpretation is somewhere, a hidden matter, and one would with its help uncover that hidden matter.

6.4.2. Second Group

Another group of researchers of the Qur'an have introduced interpretation as the key to understanding Qur'anic verses. Understanding, they say, is not possible without interpretation. For example, Zarkashi realizes interpretation in understanding,²⁹ or Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, after subdividing interpretation by Order and by Subject, considers the goal of sequential interpretation as understanding the significance and the meaning of verses³⁰. Moreover, Abdol azim Zarqani states that acting according to Qur'anic teachings depends on understanding and understanding depends on interpretation.³¹

As it was mentioned earlier, one could infer from interpreters of the first group, including Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, that understanding has priority over interpretation while, according to what the second group of interpreters write, one could conclude that interpretation has priority over understanding, that is understanding is the outcome of interpretation. However, the evidence in sources of both groups³² show that the understanding which comes before interpretation is the customary understanding but that which comes after interpretation refers to the learned and methodic understanding.³³

For instance, after Tabatabai states in *Tafsit al-Mizan* that all Qur'anic verses are understandable and that there is no single verse which is not, a few pages later he describes this sort of understanding as customary understanding which is based on common sense and habit which he regards as a hindrance to the divine intention.³⁴

Qur'anic teachings could be used by both common people and scholars. However, the common people are content with surface meaning since the common mind is mostly familiar with sensible matters. So they are content with something relevant to what they perceive. But the scholars (who enjoy scholarly understanding) reach the facts beyond the surface meaning. They realize its delicate references and innuendos and submit to that. For instance, let us examine the meaning of this Qur'anic verse: "الله نور السموات و الارض..."³⁵ (God is the light of heavens and earth...). In this verse God has identified his essence in the world. Since light is the highest form of existence in

the world of the senses, He has chosen it for his purpose. Through such an image, the common people could imagine a more transparent and clearer being of the holy essence of the creator which resides beyond the senses and is similar to light in the world of the senses. However, scholars have the closest image of the holy essence of the comparison. There is nothing like light in the world of the senses which could exemplify God and help towards building an image of the special attributes of God, since light, by its very essence, is apparent and clear and clarifies others. In this world, everything appears through light; nevertheless, light itself is essentially apparent by itself and not through others. The attributes of God in the above-mentioned verse allude to the same meaning. Considering the truth about the existence of God, He is self-sufficient that manifests others; the truth of His essence is hidden but the effects of His being are clear and manifest.³⁶

6.5. Understanding and Interpretation: Similarities and Differences

1. As mentioned earlier, understanding in interpretation is divided into primary and final understanding or, in other words, customary and learned methodic meaning. Of the two types of understanding the one which is the result of the process of interpretation and shaped according to particular rules and conditions is and valid for all Qur'anic verses. The other type of understanding achievable before interpretation and which does not follow rules and conditions, is no evidence for any verse and is valid only in some Qur'anic verses – that is from the point of view of some interpreters.

In the hermeneutics of Hirsch, too, the term understanding is introduced as one of the functions of every literary text which is called “skill of understanding” by him.³⁷

What is called understanding in Hirsch's hermeneutics is not, according to interpreters, the customary understanding since understanding with Hirsch, as a basic function of every literary text, is the skill of understanding. This skill, as the name shows, represents the specialty of the interpreter and the addressee in the process of understanding, where specialty shows method and discipline in the process of understanding. Therefore, the hermeneutic understanding of Hirsch is almost the same as the learned understanding which is the process of interpretation. What is meant by *almost* here is that the final understanding is much deeper and wider than

Hirsch's understanding. In the final understanding, interpreters consider matters which have absolutely no place in the hermeneutics of Hirsch, who believes that the domain of hermeneutics does not go beyond the internal study of the text, while the receiver of the text could not use his external data for understanding the text. If he did so and compared and contrasted the text with various data and findings, he would have transgressed the hermeneutic limit and entered the stage of judgment and criticism.³⁸

2. What is called "skill of understanding" in Hirsch's hermeneutics is termed "interpretation" from the perspective of interpreters of the Qur'an. But there are similarities and differences between the skill of understanding and interpretation as a term.³⁹

6.5.1. Similarities

Understanding and interpretation both look for the aims and intentions of the speaker.

The subject of skill of understanding and interpretation is comprised of words and sentences which make up a text in order to lead the addressee and interpreter to the aim and intention of the speaker.

Hirsch too, like Tabatabai, believes that there is a relationship between meaning and the speaker's will and intention. The meaning of the writer's discourse is what he or she wants to convey.

Hirsch stipulates "that meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words".⁴⁰ He also notes that a verbal meaning is a "willed type",⁴¹ that is a "whole meaning" that is willed (intended).⁴²

Hirsch points out that the major goal of hermeneutics is to find out about the author's intention that forms the true meaning of the text and is the only measuring criterion for distinguishing valid from invalid interpretation.⁴³ Thus the meaning of the text and the intention of the author could not be separated; for the author creates this meaning consciously and with a specific intention. Accordingly, the writer completely rejects the viewpoint of modern literary criticism where criticism and

author are separated. He calls it relativism. Parallel to this, Heidegger and Gadamar are described as sceptic and the destructive critics of “objectivity” whose intention is to draw hermeneutics into the mire of relativism which has no criterion.

The aim of interpretation, from Tabatabai’s viewpoint, is to get to God’s intention and essentially many conditions and rules of interpretation are thus organized. Many issues of the science of jurisprudence are shaped with the aim of understanding the discourse of the speaker and writer.

Unlike *Hashviyeh*, researchers of the Qur’an believe that God has an intention for individual Qur’anic verses in the absence of which there would be two problems: 1) insensibility of which God is free.⁴⁴ and 2) according to many Qur’anic verses, the verses are addressed to human beings; thus God intends to make them understandable, otherwise there would be no addressees.⁴⁵

4. According to Hirsch the only method of comprehending a text using the skill of understanding is the method of reading text by text which enables the reader or the interpreter to understand the sentences through its words and the terms of the text. As he states with regard to this method:

To understand an utterance it is, in fact, not just desirable but absolutely unavailable that we understand it in its own terms. We could not possibly recast a text’s meanings in different terms unless we had already understood the text on its own.⁴⁶

He says against those who claim it is impossible to achieve an understanding of the text through itself:

The sceptical historicist infers too much from the fact that present-day experiences, categories, and modes of thought are not the same as those of the past. He concludes that we can only understand a text on our own terms, but this is a contradictory statement since verbal meaning has to be construed within its own terms if it is to be construed at all.⁴⁷

Hirsch’s method of understanding the text could be comparable with Allameh Tabatabaei’s point of view concerning the exegesis of Qur’anic verses as he stipulates that the only correct way to interpret the Qur’an is Qur’anic interpretation

through the Qur'an itself. So, there is a common point between Hirsch and Allameh Tabatabai regarding how to understand the text.

But there is a difference between them after applying the method by which the text can be understood, in the sense that according to Hirsch, an interpreter who is working on a text with the help of the words and sentence structure of that text, would not be able to look at the text with the knowledge he has acquired which is related to beyond the text. If he did so, his attempt to reach an understanding is not called Hermeneutics but falls into the area of "judgment and criticism". However, Allameh Tabatabai's view is very different from Hirsch's respective with regard to this issue. Although Tabatabai's method in his commentary of the Qur'an is a sort of interpretation of the text through the text, yet it could be compared to everything pertaining to what is beyond the text. It is evident that on the basis of Shiite exegetes, especially Allameh Tabatabai, it would be a kind of interpretation, while Hirsch regards that as beyond the scope of Hermeneutics.

As he stipulates in the introduction of *Al-Mizan* after mentioning methods of other exegetes in interpreting the Qur'an:

If you look at all the methods of exegesis, you will find that all of them suffer from a most serious defect: they impose the results of academic or philosophic arguments on the Qur'anic meanings; they make the Qur'an conform to an extraneous idea. In this way, explanation turns into adaptation, realities of the Qur'an are explained away as allegories and its manifest meanings are sacrificed for so-called "interpretations".⁴⁸

As regards the comprehension of Qur'anic realities he also says:

The exegete explains the verse with the help of other relevant verses, meditating on them together - and meditation has been forcefully urged upon by the Qur'an itself - and identifies the individual person or thing by its particulars and attributes mentioned in the verse. No doubt this is the only correct method of exegesis. Allah has said: *and we have revealed the book to you explaining clearly everything (16: 89)* so is it possible for such a book not to explain its own self? Also he has described the Qur'an in these words: *guidance for mankind and clear evidence of guidance and discrimination (between right and wrong) (2:*

185); and he has also said: *and we have sent down to you a manifest light (4:174)*. The Qur'an is, accordingly, a guidance, an evidence, a discrimination between right and wrong and a manifest light for the people to guide them aright and help them in all their needs. Is it imaginable that it would not guide them aright in its own matter, while it is their most important need? Again Allah says: *and (as for) those who strive hard for us, we will most certainly guide them onto our ways (29:69)*. Which striving is greater than the endeavour to understand his book? And which way is more straight than the Qur'an? ⁴⁹

Allameh Tabatabaei, in order to confirm his method of exegesis of the Holy Qur'an, mentions Imam Ali's saying in this respect:

Ali (a.s) said, inter alia, speaking about the Qur'an in a sermon: *"Its one part speaks with the other, and one portion testifies about the other."* This is the straight path and the right way which was used by the true teachers of the Qur'an and its guides, may Allah's blessings be on them all! ⁵⁰

6.5.2. Differences

One of the differences between Hirsch's theory and the theory of Tabatabai is related to conditions and regulations which need to have an addressee and an interpreter.

Uncovering God's intention from Qur'anic verses is conditioned by some preliminaries that an addressee should have. Much less is needed for a literary text. The interpreter or addressee of a human text, due to the limitation of information and the knowledge of its author, does not need to know about all the sciences. He should know enough about the subject matter he is dealing with (e.g. law or geography) and be familiar with the special concepts of the discipline. At the same time, he should observe the general conditions pertaining to understanding the text. Then he could easily understand a particular text and interpret it. However, as regards the revelational texts especially the Holy Qur'an, it is the book of "guidance", "revealing", "preaching" and "treatment" and includes a huge collection of knowledge and divine sciences, all of which are needed to fully realize the goal of understanding and interpreting it. Sciences such as lexicon, grammar, eloquence, principles of jurisprudence, theology, mysticism, Qur'anic sciences, anthropology,

experimental and human sciences, and so on as well as the conditions and spiritual characteristics as introductions to understanding and interpreting the Qur'an, are all emphasized by Muslim interpreters like Tabatabai.⁵¹

Accordingly he writes:

As *suyuti* said in the book of *al-Itqan*, there are fifteen in all: language, syntax, conjugation, etymology, styles of literature, rhetoric, elocution, recitation of the Qur'an, roots of religion, fundamentals of jurisprudence, the reasons and occasion of the revelations (as well as the stories mentioned in the Qur'an), abrogating and abrogated verses, law of the Shariah, traditions that explain the general and unspecific verses, and the gifted knowledge.⁵²

There is a direct correlation between the understanding of the Qur'an and the knowledge of the interpreter regarding all these subjects. Having a thorough knowledge of the background subjects, such as what is related to the sciences and rules of Arabic language as well as aspects of the eloquence of the Qur'an, is so essential that understanding the Qur'an would be impossible without knowing about them. Also knowing the reasons for the revelation of the verses is useful for a true understanding. The interpreter is not qualified to interpret Qur'anic verses without this knowledge. Therefore, knowledge of literary sciences as well as familiarity with Islamic sciences, the method of the Qur'an in introducing the problems and finally full knowledge of the Qur'an, knowledge of the Prophet's traditions and the Imams regarding the interpretation of the verses - all are of great importance. There would be no true interpretation without them.⁵³ One other condition and principle for an interpreter applies: that no ideas and beliefs of the interpreter are imposed on the Qur'an. As Allameh Tabatabai declares:

They (some scientists and philosophers) impose the results of academic or philosophic arguments on the Qur'an meanings; they make them conform to an extraneous idea. In this way, explanation turns into adaptation, realities of the Qur'an are explained away as allegories and its manifest meanings are sacrificed for so-called "interpretations".⁵⁴

2. According to Tabatabai, the subject of “skill of understanding” is different from the subject of the “expression of interpretation”. The subject of skill of understanding, as Hirsch claims, is the verbal meaning conveying what is intended through a series of linguistic signs which could be transferred or shared by others.⁵⁵ However, the subject of interpretation in Islamic sources is the Qur’anic verses. Qur’anic verses, sometimes corresponding to each other and sometimes they do not. Some of the Qur’anic verses have their imaginative, acknowledging and serious indicated⁵⁶ as the same, while in some other verses the three kinds of signified are different. Of the three types of significance, as Muslim interpreters term it, the imaginative signified is known as verbal meaning. However, the acknowledging signified and the serious signified are not described as verbal meaning. Therefore, one could not, like Hirsch, recognize verbal meaning as the intention of the author; but the verbal meaning might not be what is intended by God.

3. Hirsch who believes in the intention of the author, supposes in his hermeneutics that “verbal meaning”, that is the intention expressed by words and sentences, is definite and one. As a result its understanding would also be definite and one. All get the same understanding of a single text and its sentences while their difference in terms of its explanation is something they have realized from the text. Although all interpreters, in interpreting what they have understood by means of different words and expressions, may not be the same, their understanding is the same.

According to what has been said about the intentional theory of which Hirsch is a follower, only the intention of the author could be a basis for judging irrelevant expressions from the meaning of the text.⁵⁷ That is because Hirsch does not consider the intention external to the work but he regards it as an essential and internal matter.⁵⁸

Interpreters too have accepted the principle of meaning as used by Hirsch. That is according to interpreters of the Qur’an, especially Tabatabai, God has an intention for the verses and reciting them is essential for understanding. However, the difference between interpreters of the Qur’an and Hirsch is that the interpreters believe in one and a definite meaning with many layers. These layers, according to some traditions, can be seven or seventy and the addressees of the Qur’an could reach a layer or layers of the meaning of the verses if they are qualified as

interpreters and be able to use the rules and criteria. However, according to Hirsch, a text has only one meaning and the meaning does not come layer by layer. What the interpreter of the text, within the domain of the text itself or a psychological structure which is rooted in romantic hermeneutics, understands is the intention of the author. This intention does not change in different times, places and situations.

According to researchers of the Qur'an, this Book has different meanings achievable along with the progress of human beings in different disciplines. But all the meanings, the discovered and the undiscovered have a paradigmatic and not syntagmatic relation.⁵⁹

Allameh Tabatabai ascribes a back and a front to Qur'anic verses and exemplifies it through the fact that the reader gets various meanings from a single verse. For example, idolatry might be described as worshipping idols on the first reading. However, when the reader thinks about the verse and attempts an analysis it becomes clear that worshipping idols is prohibited since it is a sort of submission to a non-Divine entity (or God). Further analysis brings us to the understanding that there is no difference between the self and the other in terms of submission and worship. One should worship and devote himself neither to the other nor to his carnal soul, which stands against the divine. Still it becomes clearer when there is a more precise analysis: essentially, no attention ought to be paid to anything other than God. Otherwise, God would be neglected, which is against the spirit of worship and devotion to which we are all invited. Therefore, the word idolatry, used in Qur'anic verses, means something first; but with further investigation and attention to other verses, the meaning finds a new general significance, being all intended by God.

Another example is when we see the Holy Qur'an orders us to perform prayer, its apparent meaning is to do specific worship; but the inner meaning of such a command is to obey and praise God heartily. Even we must realize that human beings must regard themselves as worthless in front of the Almighty Allah and unattach themselves from their personal possessions as well as worldly commodities for the sake of Allah.⁶⁰

Hence Qur'anic verses might have different stages of meaning in a way that every one of these degrees of meaning can be considered as stages of inner meaning and

contribute to a real sense of the understanding of the religion. However, according to Allameh Tabatabai it should not be forgotten that all of these meanings come in a single file not in parallel. That is to say, there is no contradiction between apparent and inner meaning and likewise the inner meaning is within the soul which revives and is essential to its body. It is worth mentioning that Islam will not ignore apparent meaning. Of course understanding of apparent and inner Qur'anic verses depends on logic and a special method which makes it possible to distinguish a correct understanding from an incorrect one.⁶¹

Thus Allameh Tabatabai asserts:

The emergence of a primary simple meaning of a verse and, consequently, a broader meaning, and the semantic appearance of one meaning over another meaning are normal throughout the Holy Qur'an. When we think about these meanings, the meaning of the Prophet's well-known *hadith*, narrated in different books of *hadith* and interpretation become clear: (Truly, the Qur'an has the exterior (*Zhar*) and the interior (*Batn*) and another interior to its interior, up to seven interiors).⁶²

According to interpreters and researchers of the Holy Qur'an, following some of the traditions, Qur'anic verses can have seven, or for the traditions, seventy interiors and these various interiors of meaning seek different understandings as otherwise a variety of interiors would not be justifiable. That is why Allameh Tabatabai stresses :

No one who has meditated on the Qur'an would deny that the Qur'anic verses have various consecutive connotations – one behind the other. But all those connotations are, in fact, various levels of the meanings of the words – and especially so if we say that they are concomitants of the first meaning. And their understandability varies according to the intelligence levels of the readers.⁶³

Hence, the different meanings which are extracted from Qur'anic verses will not be contradictory:

Divine inspirations have inner meaning in addition to apparent meaning. So we can derive various meaning from Qur'anic's verses and authentic traditions without any contradictions. In many traditions it has been narrated that the Qur'an has an apparent meaning and an inner one. Some of the traditions stipulate that the inner meaning can itself have up to seven layers.⁶⁴

6.6. The Function of Interpretation

Another function of a text which stands second after the function of understanding is interpretation. According to Hirsch, the interpreter or addressee of a text thinks of understanding the text in the first place. Only after understanding and perception, the author's intention can be explained and understood.

In Hirsch's hermeneutics, understanding or the skill of understanding is "interpretation" according to Islamic interpreters. Therefore, what Hirsch considers interpretation or explanatory skill, as the stage after understanding, could not be interpretation by expression from the perspective of the researchers of the Qur'an. Interpretation, according to the latter, is the discovery of God's intention while interpretation which has been called "the second function" of a text is merely the explanation of what the interpreter has understood from the text. Therefore, the term interpretation, according to Hirsch, means explanation, explication and description, and this meaning is what the lexicographers expressed for the word interpretation. However, interpreters of the Qur'an intend a particular meaning and concept.

"*Tafsir*" derived from word "*Fasare*" in Arabic, meaning to reveal and to clear up.⁶⁵

According to exegetes of the Holy Qur'an the aim of *Tafsir* (interpretation) is to explain, in order to discover God's intention in the Qur'anic verses. It is obvious that whenever words or text are complex, we need to paraphrase them. In another words, interpretation of the Qur'an could be done and disclosed when facing complications.⁶⁶

So, interpretation comes in when there is a kind of ambiguity in words, which leads to the “meaning” and the “connotation” becoming ambiguous and a definite need to strive to remove any obscurity from the “meaning” in order to achieve the author’s intention.

This is the key point distinguishing interpretation from translation. The latter concerns the literal meaning of a word with all its pertaining issues, and will be resolved by looking it up in the dictionary so there is no need to make any further effort. Yet in interpretation although the meaning of the word is clear, a sort of ambiguity is observed regarding the meaning.⁶⁷ It is because of the reality that an interpreter struggles to discover the intention of the author not only in explaining and unveiling the apparent or external meaning of the word or verse which has been understood previously. Therefore, for Qur’anic exegetes, interpretation is to reveal the meaning and intention of the verse.⁶⁸ Obviously all explanations are given in order to reach the aforesaid purpose.

6.7. Criticism and Judgment

As mentioned earlier, Hirsch, in addition to the two functions of understanding and interpretation, considers two other functions for every literary text: the function of judgment and the function of criticism. Hirsch postulates that the subject of the first two functions or understanding and interpretation constitute the verbal meaning. But the subject of the second two functions, judgment and criticism, constitute signification.⁶⁹ That is whenever we want to compare the text to external information and speak of correspondence or lack of correspondence of the text with the information, the function of judgment takes place. Once we explain this comparison and the process of judgment for others, we have reached the function of criticism. Hirsch believes that the latter two functions are beyond hermeneutics, understanding and interpretation.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, according to Muslim interpreters, including Allameh Tabatabai, the two functions (criticism and judgment) are not outside interpretation. It is on a par with understanding the speaker's intention. Interpretations of the

Qur'an, throughout the history of interpretation, have practically included such issues in the arena of interpretation. Some interpretations of the Qur'an have been written according to their functions. For example, the interpretation of Fakhr-e Razi is known as an intellectual interpretation, or that of *Al-Jawaher fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*" (*The Jewels in the interpretation of the Qur'an*) written by Tantawi is known as a scientific one. The interpretations with no inclination have also benefited from the intellectual, scientific, mystical, philosophical and other methods of interpretation; they have compared the verses from those perspectives.⁷¹

Moreover, neither is it intellectually possible to regard judgment and criticism outside the arena of interpretation. The reason is that every interpreter who attempts an interpretation of the Qur'anic verses intends to discover the intention of God. Paying attention to the information and issues at the stage of interpretation is inevitable and effective in understanding the verses.⁷²

For example, if an interpreter wants to understand the holy verse, ⁷³ *ثم استوى على* (then dominated the world) and realize God's intention, inevitably he has to use his reason and understands the verse with this meaning: that God is not material and not restricted in the form of place and time. Otherwise, the interpreter would go astray and would reach something other than the intention of God. Consider this verse: ⁷⁴ *"الذى جعل لكم الارض فراشا"* If the interpreter does not pay attention to the scientific finding and information he, like earlier interpreters, would read the verse literally as inhabiting the earth.

Doubtless, the development of science and philosophy are among the effective elements in understanding religion, specially the Holy Qur'an. The more humanity has progressed scientifically, the easier it is to understand the facts of the universe and the concepts of the Divine Word. Today, with the help of definite and clear scientific achievements many ties could be untied and uncover cases of ambiguities in the Qur'an, which had been impossible earlier. Human society and thought is developing day by day. Mankind is adding to

his knowledge on a daily basis. Then new branches of knowledge emerge in the light of scientific development. Therefore, external data are very effective in interpreting and explaining Qur'anic verses. Thus interpretation of the Qur'an always changes in correspondence to daily conditions, scientific changes and human perfection throughout the ages. Human understanding like that of the scholars, undergoes change and development: earlier interpreters are used to introducing or correcting more recent material.⁷⁵

One clear example is *Tafsir al-Mizan* itself. A huge volume of it has been influenced by transcendental wisdom and philosophy. Tabatabai has interpreted many verses of the Qur'an with the support of philosophical proofs and basics.⁷⁶ Although his method is the type known as "interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an", his viewpoint concerning Qur'anic verses is often a philosophical one.,t. Thus he has sometimes treated complex philosophical issues subject-wise in *Al-Mizan*.

Among cotemporary Shiite interpreters many scholars have emphasized this issue (that is they regard criticism and judgment as a stage in interpretation). For example, Muhammad Baqir Sadr, one of those who built up a relationship between interpretation, information and demands of the age, insists mostly on the method of interpretation by subject. He postulates that this method leads to growth, novelty and development of intellectual evidence in the interpretation of the Qur'an. The reason is that, unlike earlier traditional methods, the interpreter concentrates his ideas on one of the ideological, o social or other topics. Then he focuses on and studies the problems and solutions introduced so far by experience and human thought about it. Next he observes all relevant verses, raises questions about them and answers them. As a result this sort of study of the Qur'an is not merely the interpretation of a verse, but it is a dialogue, questioning, looking for answers, and help toward realization of facts from among them on a topical basis.⁷⁷

Therefore, the more the interpreter broods over different relevant contemporary sciences, the more he understands the meaning of the Qur'an with a deeper inference and insight. Thus one weakness of the interpreters in their interpretation is the inattention to useful sciences, which are very effective in understanding the Qur'an. However, adherents of this group think it unworthy of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, if it is observed with precision it becomes clear that sciences like history, politics, religion as well as sociology are very effective in understanding and explaining the meaning of the Qur'an.⁷⁸

The Qur'anic text, throughout the ages, faced the growth of human sciences and was an inspiration for interpreters to use the culture, insight, human disciplines and experimental sciences of their eras in interpretation. As interpreters increased their knowledge of the secrets of existence, as well as their inside knowledge of mankind, their discovery of the heart of the Qur'anic text together with all its aspects becomes more fruitful and deeper.⁷⁹

Doubtless, the advancement of sciences has paved the way for many studies in interpretation of the Qur'an in the absence of which there would never be an access to the delicacies of the Qur'an. Even earlier interpreters have not reached it. It is then clear that it is a part of the nature of the Qur'an to have the capability to be interpreted in every age and not to be limited by any era. Thus it is necessary to study it in the light of changes of the era, provided that the spirit of the Qur'an and Islam is protected.⁸⁰

The great contemporary interpreter Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai also believes that the interpretation of the Qur'an should be changed every two years.⁸¹ This means that time, era, change and scientific development all affect interpretation of the Qur'an: it is essential to introduce interpretations suitable for the era in which one lives.

Many instances are observed in *Tafsir al-Mizan* where some verses have been studied and interpreted in the light of the contemporary information and sciences. Following are three instances in brief.

6.7.1. First Instance

Thus says the Supreme Being in the Qur'an, "ثم استوى الى السماء وهي دخان"⁸² (Then He paid attention to the creation of heavens which were gas) There have been various interpretations about the gas - rather of heaven - since the advent of Islam up to the contemporary age, from the evaporation of water to its interpretation as gas (Sodium Theory).⁸³

Allame Tabatabai, after mentioning some of the traditions from the infallible Imams to explain the verse, says that it is possible to match up the content of these traditions and verses with the decisive hypothesis of modern sciences concerning the creation of the world as well as its quality and form. He believes that if this kind of modern theory becomes a definite science then it can be raised as a scientific reason that would conform to Qur'anic verses.⁸⁴

6.7.2. Second Instance

The second sample is about evolution in understanding some of the Qur'anic verses in Islamic interpretations. We now refer to just two verses. The Qur'an says:

Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe it ?⁸⁵

Commentaries on this verse are very different amongst previous and current exegetes. Old (ancient) interpreters use to say: nothing grew on the earth in the past, however God opened the earth through splitting the sky and caused the descent of rain and that made plants grow and the terrestrial globe to come alive.⁸⁶ But the current interpreters stipulate that this verse is basically connected with the creation of the world and they believed what the holy Qur'an referred to was the creation of the solar system. Allameh Tabatabai in his interpretation of the phrase of the verse; "*we made from water every living thing*" says: "It means water is the basic factor in the

existence of every living being. As has been proved in new scientific issues, life is connected with water.”⁸⁷

He also states in clarifying verse number 47, *Zariat surah: with power and skill did we construct the firmament: for it is we who create the vastness of space*. This means bringing about the creation of the sky, as nowadays mathematical sciences have demonstrated.⁸⁸

6.7.3. Third Instance

Prior to the theory of “transformation of kinds”, which began with Darwin’s hypothesis, reformed and completed by other scientists, old interpreters of the holy Qur’an had no doubt that according to Qur’anic verses concerning the creation of mankind, Adam’s creation took place all at once.⁸⁹

After the appearance of various theories about the transformation and evolution of man’s creation, at least amongst modern exegetes, including Allameh Tabatabai, it was held that if Qur’anic verses did not indicate the evolutionary theory they nevertheless did not contradict it..⁹⁰

Hence, contemporary interpreters and especially Allameh Tabatabai seeks help from experimental sciences in the exegesis of this part of the Qur’an; this demonstrates that criticism and judgment enter into any discussion of interpretation. Yet Hirsch does not agree with this point of view. Basically according to interpreters and researchers of the Holy Qur’an every effort which leads to discovery of the author’s intentions and to unveil the reality, will fall into the category of interpretation and understanding. As a matter of fact Islamic texts comprise various layers, some of which appear gradually as science develops. That is why the first addressees at the advent of Islam could not understand. Nowadays the real interpreter of the Qur’an who has the right qualifications penetrates from one layer to another.

The speaker might have intended a general fixed and permanent meaning but it is not realized in a vacuum. The audience too receives the general and permanent intention of the speaker in particular intellectual conditions which prevail in any one time and place. That is why any future audience should benefit from a similar mentality to that of the primary audience, in order to

correctly understand the intended meaning. Personal systematic reasoning in Islamic texts in the sense of accessibility to correct understanding is parallel to what early audiences have realized about the texts. Of course, it is clear that early audiences were only able to understand the meaning of the texts according to their intellectual power, thought and prevailing scientific opinion. Since the application of the text goes beyond time and place, only one layer of textual meaning is recognized each time. An evidence to this fact is a tradition by the Prophet with explicit significance: *رب حامل فقه ليس بفقيه و رب حامل فقه الى من هو افقه منه* (there are people who narrate jurisprudence while they are not jurists and there are people who narrate jurisprudential traditions to someone who is more knowledgeable).⁹¹ This statement by the Prophet does not accuse early audiences of wrong thinking in religion; it also introduces their understanding as non-jurisprudential. A jurist in Qur'anic terms is someone who goes beyond the first layer of a statement and message and reaches deep layers and the intended truth.⁹²

This fact is true at any one time about all those who with personal systematic reasoning and prudence are involved in religious understanding. Wherever they are, in terms of class, position and period of time, they become subjects of the first part of the Prophet's tradition. That they have merely realized a layer (though deeper) of the understanding of earlier generations, new understanding will be crystallized in the knowledge of futurity. This process, called continuous personal systematic reasoning, will continue. Each time a new article of jurisprudence and a reading of religion are introduced which corresponds to the understanding and jurisprudence of an earlier generation in its content and truth, new layers of religion are revealed.⁹³

¹ Khoui, Abol-Qasem, *Al-Bayan*, P.267.

² Ibid, p.298.

³ Tabatabai, Muhammad Hossein, *Al-Mizan*, vol.3, p. 40.

⁴ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.145-46.

⁵ Ibid, Vol 1, p.10.

⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

⁷ Tabatabaei, Mohammad Hossein, *Barrasi haye Islami*, Vol 3, p.43.

⁸ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 5, p.38.

⁹ Ibid, Vol.5.p.125.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.126.

¹¹ Ibid, p.127.

¹² Qur'an, 48:10.

¹³ Ibid, 20:5.

¹⁴ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.146-47.

¹⁵ The attached contextual element is any word that, connecting to another word, nullifies its apparent meaning and directs the overall meaning of the context in a direction compatible with its own meaning. Sometimes a contextual element is not directly attached to a given statement, but occurs separately from it, in which case it is termed a detached contextual element (*qarinah munfasilah*). An example of this possibility would be for someone to give the instruction, "be generous to all the poor", and after a while to add, in a separate statement, "Do not be generous to the sinful among the poor". If the prohibition contained in the second statement had come within the first statement, it would have been considered an attached contextual element, but being included in a separate statement it counts as a detached contextual element.

¹⁶ *Al-Miza*, Vol 1,p.367.

¹⁷ Ibid, Vol 5, PP.256-66.

¹⁸ Ibid, Vol 1, p.4.

¹⁹ *Lesan Al-Arab*, Ibn manzur, Vol 6.p.361; *AL-Borhan*, Vol2.p.548.

²⁰ *Magazine of pajuhesh nameye Qur'ani*, No.21-22,p.148.

²¹ Zarqani, Abd Al-Azim, *Manahel Al- Erfan*, Vol2.p.6.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Al-Bayan Fi TAafsir Al-Qur'an*, p.187.

²⁴ *Mabani va raveshhaye tafsire Qur'an*, Zanjani, Amid, p.114.

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- ²⁵ *Tafsir va Mofasseran*, Vol 1, p.18.
- ²⁶ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 1, p.3.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, Vol 3, p.46.
- ²⁸ *Al-Mizan*, Vol. I, p.19.
- ²⁹ Zarakashi, *al-Burhan fi Oloum al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2, p.291.
- ³⁰ Sadr, Sayyed Muhammad Baqir, *Muqaddamat fi al-Tafsir al-Mouthuee* [Introduction to topical interpretation], p.11.
- ³¹ Zarqani, Abdol Azim, *Manahel al-Irfan*, Vol.2, p.8.
- ³² Sadr, Sayyed Muhammad Baqir, *Muqaddamat fi al-Tafsir al-Mouthuee*, p.11
- ³³ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.148-51
- ³⁴ *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 1, p.11.
- ³⁵ Holy Qur'an, 24:35.
- ³⁶ Ma'refat, Muhammad Hadi, *Tafsir va Mofasseran*, Vol.1, pp.108-9.
- ³⁷ *Validity in Interpretation*, p.136.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, p.143.
- ³⁹ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.151-52.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.4.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.51.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, p.49.
- ⁴³ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, Northwestern university press, 1969, p.60.
- ⁴⁴ *Al-Mahsoul fi Elm al-Osoul*, Vol.1, p.169.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.488.
- ⁴⁶ *Validity in interpretation*, p.134.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.135.
- ⁴⁸ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 1, p.9.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.12.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.14.
- ⁵¹ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.152-3.
- ⁵² *Ibid*, Vol 5, p.114.

⁵³ Taheri ,Habibollah, *Darshai' az Oloum-e Qur'ani [Lessons from Qur'anic Sciences]*, p.206.

⁵⁴ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 1, p.9.

⁵⁵ *Validity in interpretation*, p.31.

⁵⁶ In every language there are established relationships between a collection of words and a collection of meanings. Every word is associated with a specific meaning in a way that enables our mind, when we conceive the word, to move immediately to conceiving the meaning. This association between the conception of the word and conception of the meaning, and the movement of the mind from one to the other, is what is termed 'the indication' (*al-dalalah*). But *al-dalalah al-tasdiqiyyah* means Sanctional signification, that which discloses the intention of the speaker and requires us not simply to conceive it, but to acknowledge it.

⁵⁷ Coucens Hoy, David, *The critical circle*, p.27

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.28.

⁵⁹ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.153-6.

⁶⁰ Tabatabaei, Mohammad Hossein, *Shi'i dar Islam*, p.49.

⁶¹ Mohmmadrezaei, Mohammad, *Elaheyate Falsafi*, Qom, Bustane ketab, p.94.

⁶² Tabatabai ,Muhammad Hussein, *The Qur'an in Islam*, pp. 21-2.

⁶³ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 5, p.71.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, Vol 3, p.72.

⁶⁵ *Tafsir va Mofasseroun* Vol, P.17.

⁶⁶ Amin, Hasan, *Daeratolma'aref al- Eslamyee* (Islamic encyclopedia), Vol 3, P.47, Article of Shahid Mohammad Bagher Sadr.

⁶⁷ *Tafsir va Mofasseroun*, Vol 1, P.18.

⁶⁸ *Al-mizan*, Vol 1, P. 43.

⁶⁹ *Validity in Interpretation*, p.143.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.144.

⁷¹ Abu Hajar, *Al-Tafsir al-Elmi fi al- Mizan [The scientific interpretation in al-Mizan]*, pp.150-56.

⁷² Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Jornal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.156-60.

⁷³ The Holy Qur'an, 10:3.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 2:22.

⁷⁵ Marefat ,Muhammad Hadi, *Tafsir va Mofaseran [Interpretation and Interpreters]*, Vol. II, pp.449-452.

⁷⁶ *Al- mizan*, Vol.7, p.185;Vol 14, p.268.

⁷⁷ Sadr ,Muhammad Baqir , *Al-Madrissah al-Qur'aniyeh [The School of the Qur'an]*, p.18.

⁷⁸ Ibn Ashour , Muhammad tahir, *Alaysa al-sobho be-Qarib [Is not Morning Neigh?]*, p.190.

⁷⁹ Al-Sharqawi, Effat *Al-fekr Al-Dini fi Movajehat al-Asr [The Religious Thought in Confronting the Age]*, p.45.

⁸⁰ Abu Zayad, Ahmad, *Al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah al -Nabawiyyeh [The Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah]*, Alam al-fiker journal, Vol.14, p.941.

⁸¹ Interview with Mohsen Qaraati, *Bayyanat Journal*, Vol.9, p.109.

⁸² Holy Qur'an, 41:11.

⁸³ Ayazi, Seyed Mohammad Ali ,*Qur'an va Tafsire Asri*, p.19.

⁸⁴ *Ali-Mizan*, Vol 17, p.565.

⁸⁵ Holy Qur'an, 21:30.

⁸⁶ Tabarsi, *Majma ol Bayan*, Vol 7, P. 45.

⁸⁷ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 14, P. 279.

⁸⁸ Ibid, Vol 18, P. 382.

⁸⁹ Fakhr Razi, *Tafsir Mafati al-Gheib*, Vol 18, P. 16.

⁹⁰ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 12, P. 154.

⁹¹ Koleini, *Osoule Kafi*, Vol. II, p.403.

⁹² *Mabani va Raveshhaye Tafsire Qur'an [Principles and Methods of the Interpretation of the Qur'an]*, p.280.

⁹³ Ibid.

Chapter Seven: The aims of the *Tafseir* (Exegesis)

7.1. The purpose of Exegesis

As mentioned earlier, Hirsch regards discovering the intention of the author as the basic aim of Hermeneutics and the criterion for distinguishing correct from incorrect interpretation. He emphasizes the point that the meaning of the text is the one created intentionally by the author. He does not agree with critics of the modern literature, who consider the text as a phenomenon independent from the author, and calls them “Relativists” or “Subjectivists”. According to him, the only way for the interpreter to exit from the “Relativism” is to follow “the author’s intention” as the best rule to recognize the correct exegesis. As he reiterates, the author’s intention must be the norm by which the validity of any “interpretation” (explanation of the verbal meaning of a passage) is measured. Furthermore, he argues that this intention is a determinate entity about which objective evidence can be gathered and that, when the evidence is in hand, a determination of the meaning can be made which will be universally recognized as valid.¹

Allameh Tabatabai, after describing his method adopted in *Al-Mizan* to find out the meanings of the verses of the Qur’an, states : “(The aim of) *Tafsir* (Exegesis) is to explain the meaning of the Qur’anic verse, clarifying its import and finding out its significance. It is one of the earliest academic activities in Islam”.²

He also places emphasis on the *intention* of the author. He maintains that every effort in interpreting the Holy Qur’an must be made to find *God’s intention*.³ Basically many interpretive conditions and principles which have been expressed in the books on Qur’an exegesis are to secure this aim. Many of the Principles of jurisprudence were compiled in order to understand the words of the author or speaker.⁴

Interpreters and researchers of the Qur’an use various methods to discover an author’s intention, most important of which is the linguistic method. In this method Qur’anic verses are studied by means of linguistic rules and formulas in order to achieve God’s intention. As previously mentioned, many subjects such as language,

syntax, conjugation, etymology, rhetoric, elocution and principles of jurisprudence in particular are applied in this method of exegesis.

In this way Allameh Tabatabai believes that the aim of exegesis of the Qur'an and all religious texts is to attain the intention or message of the author. He cites some Qur'anic verses as an example: "If *The Qur'an (with care) had been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy*"⁵. As well as "(Here is) a Book which we have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition"⁶ and so on, to prove that the Holy Qur'an was transmitted so that believers should contemplate the verses and find out God's intention as well as use the message within it in their lives. So, such verses clearly imply that all believers are required to reflect on the verses to unveil what God intended in achieving the right path, otherwise why are people urged to comprehend the verses?

Since interpretation of the text by the Islamic scholars is a methodical matter and not philosophical, great exegetes including Allameh Tabatabai mentioned some rules and conditions for an interpreter in the light of which he reaches the divine intentions. This point shows that they looked at exegesis from a methodical aspect. Moreover, we can find out that all exegetes, in order to fulfill God's intention, believed it is essential to choose a right and less vulnerable way to comment on the Qur'an.

In this way, the interpretation of *Al-Mizan* matches up with romantic Hermeneutics which seeks the correct method of interpretation of the text, unlike modern Hermeneutics that tries to explain the issue of understanding. In other words, according to them, it is not the interpreter's duty to bring in criteria and norms for interpreting the text, rather he is obliged only to analyse inherent forms of the understanding itself.

Because the only purpose of Qur'anic interpretation is to express reality, the Prophet of Islam warned his followers against interpreting Qur'anic verses by "self-personal interpretation". He explains that they will face God's chastisement even if their interpretation works out correctly.⁷

Prophet Mohammad also said: "Whoever interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinion, should settle himself in his seat of fire."

Allameh Tabatabai in explaining the above tradition says:

The words of the Prophet mean the belief reached after diligent research. It is also used for the opinion based on desire and one's own inclination. The Prophet has used the phrase "his opinion"; it shows that what is condemned is the interpretation of a verse independently without looking at other relevant verses. It does not forbid striving hard and doing one's utmost to understand the meaning of the Qur'an; nor does it say that one should confine oneself to what has been said in the traditions of the Prophet and infallible Imams relating to the exegesis of the verses (as many traditionalists think). Otherwise, it would be diametrically opposed to the many verses which show that the Qur'an is plain Arabic and which exhort the people to meditate on it; also it would be against many Traditions that tell them to turn to the Qur'an and judge the Traditions by it.⁸

7.2. Meaning of the text

Hirsch, contrary to Gadamer who maintains that meaning depends on the particular subjectivity of the interpreter and would be changeable in the process of tradition,⁹ believes that text meaning is the same as the intention of the author which could be fixed and unchangeable. Following are the three options concerning textual meaning:

- A. The meaning which is idiomatically called *semantic meaning* as well as *conceptual indication* in jurisprudence, that is to say, it is the meaning of the sentence that could be comprehended by paying attention to its words and synthetic form. For instance; when you bring a glass of water to someone in hot weather, he says: *what cold water!* The words *what, water, cold* and also the combination of these words, will create the meaning in your mind, which clearly signifies that he is surprised at the coldness of the water.
- B. The intention of the speaker (or author), which in Principles of the Jurisprudence is called *confirmational indication*, has the same meaning intended by the speaker through his words. Like in the previous example the speaker, in a satiric sentence, states that he is surprised at the warmth of the water.

C. The meaning is what the interpreter understands. For example, someone might find that the water was really cold in a way that surprised the speaker or he might understand that the speaker intended to be ironic and meant to allude to the warmth of the water.

Gadamer stipulates that semantic meaning (*linguistic signification*) is related to words and applies merely in the realm of Semantics as well as Linguistics. The intention of the author could not be measured as a criterion for understanding,¹⁰ as we are unable to discover one's intention other than through his words. So the only possibility left is the third meaning, i.e. the understanding of the interpreter. In this way meaning is something understood from the text.¹¹ According to Gadamer the textual meaning only depends on the understanding of the interpreter.

It is evident that there will be no criterion to distinguish a valid understanding from an invalid one, when one considers nothing except "the understanding of the interpreter". For validity of understanding would be conceptualized while there are two things and one is compared to the other so that the correct one is clear. Hence, according to Gadamer all understandings are equal and nobody could prefer one understanding from the others as correct and valid.¹²

However, Hirsch declares understandings and interpretations are not alike in terms of veracity or validity. Some are valid while others are invalid. For this reason we must keep in mind something as the meaning of the text to assess understanding of the reader in terms of validity and invalidity. Regarding the first two meanings (semantic and confirmational signification), he maintains that the meaning of the text is the same thing that the author really wishes to express, i.e. the intention of the author is the basis of textual meaning and the criterion for the validity of interpretation is to discover the meaning.¹³

However, according to Tabatabai and almost all Shi'ite interpreters, confirmational signification is divided into *serious and usage signification*. But this does not exist in the works of Hermeneutical scholars at all. The only thing they have mentioned is the intention of the author and they apparently meant by "intention of the author" the *serious signification*.

As terms and words possess a specific meaning, we can employ them to convey our intention to the audience and nobody is allowed to create a meaning for them. Since the criterion of the meaning is *Vaz* (the procedure of postulating a word for a specific meaning,) it is obvious that all of the words and terms make sense through social conventions. Since early human life, man realized that, on the one hand, he has to live collectively yet on the other, he was aware that social and collective life requires the possibility of explanation as well as understanding and exchange of views. In such a situation human beings need to invent words. They created words to transfer meaning to others.¹⁴ Afterwards he allocated a name (sign) or word (sound) to every meaning. In this way, human society conventionally postulated the words for any meaning so that they could make sense to each other. Therefore words (particular sounds) result in understanding the specific meaning and that is the effect of *Waz*. So, we cannot impose meanings on words, but anyone wise and familiar with “*Waz* who applies intellectual principles and regulations when they need to use words, understands something which others may understand too. As a result, words conventionally are used to present the meaning and we can consider them as signs or indications.”¹⁵

7.3. *Wad* (The procedure of postulating a word for a specific meaning)

One of the most important discussions in the Science of principles of jurisprudence for discovering an author’s intention is this subject of *Vaz*. This discussion has a vital influence on exegesis of the Qur’an. Allameh Tabatabai, as a jurisprudent and someone who specialized in the principles of jurisprudence, takes advantage of his background in this to interpret Qur’anic verses in *Al-mizan*. Since *Vaz* is treated as a key discussion in both principles of jurisprudence and the exegesis of the Qur’an, it is essential to clarify the subject in order to compare Allameh Tabatabai’s perspective with Hirsch’s works.

Wad means the procedure of postulating a word for a specific meaning. So when we say, ‘the word *water* it indicates a specific liquid, we mean that conceptualizing the word “*water*” leads to conceptualizing that specific liquid. Thus, we call the word the *indicator*” and the meaning “the *indicated*”. On this basis, we understand that the relationship between the conceptualization of the word and the conceptualization of

the meaning resembles, to some extent, the relationship that we observe in our daily life between *fire* and *heat* or between *the rising of the sun* and *the appearance of light*. In the same way that fire leads to heat and the rising of the sun to daylight, the conceptualization of the word leads to the conceptualization of the meaning. Thus it is possible to state that conceptualizing the word leads to conceptualizing the meaning, just as fire is a cause for heat and the rising of the sun for daylight. However, the causative relationship between the conceptualization of the word and of the meaning plays out in the mind, whereas the causative relationship between fire and heat or the rising of the sun and daylight exists in the external world.¹⁶

The basic question with regard to the connection within language between the word and the meaning is about the origin of this relationship and the way in which it is established. How did the relationship of causality between the word and the meaning originate, and in what manner did the conceptualization of the word become a cause for the conceptualization of the meaning, despite the fact that the word and the meaning are two totally different things?

Usually three views are given in the science of the principles of jurisprudence in reply to these questions:

- A. The first is based on the belief that the relationship of the word to the meaning arises from the inherent nature of the word itself, just as the relationship of fire with heat arises from the inherent nature of fire. Thus, the word *water* has by virtue of its nature a relationship with the specific meaning that we comprehend from it. This view insists that the meaning indicated by a word is inherent to it and is not derived from any external cause. This theory expressed by some theologians in the old days, now is not acceptable to all scholars of jurisprudence.
- B. The second view denies the inherency of the indicated meaning and hypothesizes that the relationships between words and their meanings in every language were established by the first person or persons who produced and spoke that language. They specified particular words for particular meanings, as a result of which words acquired a relationship with meanings and each word came to indicate its own particular meaning. That specification process practiced by those first people among whom the word-meaning nexus arose

may be termed ""postulation" (*wad*) and its practitioner a "postulator" (*wadi*); the word is the "postulated" (*al-mawdu*) and the meaning indicated by it is "that for which it was postulate" (*al-mawdu labu*)¹⁷

- C. The third theory is that signifying the word upon meaning originates from the commitment of the *Wadi* (the postulator). That is to say, whenever he intended to make understandable a particular meaning, he would introduce a specific word. Then the addressee gets the meaning as soon as he hears the word. It shows that there is an inseparable relationship between the word and the meaning. Thus *Wadi* brings about the addressee's understanding of the meaning. It is evident that such a *Wad* (Postulation) will be *Al-dalalat al-tasdiqiyyah* (confirmational signification) not *Al-dalalat al-tasaworiyyah* (linguistic signification), since after commitment of the *Wadi*, the word indicates that the speaker's purpose is to make the meaning understandable.¹⁸

7.3.1. Differences between Hirsch and Tabatabai concerning *Wad*

Hirsch's perspective fundamentally differs from Allameh Tabatabai in the subject of the *Wad* since Hirsch maintains that interpreters, in their understanding of a text, should be completely subservient to (the author's) will, because the meaning of his utterance is the meaning he wills to convey.¹⁹ There is a relationship between meaning and the author's will. But according to Tabatabai, like other Islamic scholars, every statement has two kinds of significations: Linguistic signification and Confirmational signification; the latter is divided into two, thei *intention of usage* and *serious intention*. They will be clarified respectively.

7.3.1.1. *Linguistic Signification and Confirmational Signification*

As mentioned earlier, a word signifies meaning in that conceptualization of the word itself leads to the conceptualization of the meaning; in this process, the word is termed the *indicator* (signifier) and the meaning the *indicated* (signified). This is *linguistic signification*, created by the postulation of a word for a meaning; postulation brings about a causative relationship between the conceptualization of the word and the conceptualization of the meaning. The meaning signified in this way is termed the linguistic meaning of the word.

The linguistic signification of a word cannot be separated from it irrespective of how the word is produced. Let us take as an example the statement *truth prevails*; as soon as we hear this sentence our minds immediately conceive its linguistic meaning, whether it emanates from a conscious speaker, from someone talking in his sleep or even from two stones being knocked together. We immediately conceive the meaning of the words, *truth* and *prevails*, and the non-fusional complete relationship between the two for which the structure of the sentence is postulated. It is on account of this that such an indication is termed “*conceptual signification*”.

If, however, we compare the possibilities mentioned above with regard to the utterance of the statement, we find that when the sentence is uttered by an unconscious speaker, it conveys only its linguistic signification, creating in our minds conceptions of *truth* and “*prevail* existing in a complete relationship with each other. Now, if uttered by a conscious speaker, the signification of the statement transcends the level of mere concepts and attains that of acknowledgment, for we deduce certain things concerning what the speaker has in his mind when uttering it.

7.3.1.2. *Intention of usage and serious intention*

When a conscious speaker utters a statement, certainly he intends us to conceive its linguistic meanings; this being termed his *intention of usage*, but his motive is not simply to create abstract concepts in our minds. He also has a fundamental purpose of his own, which in the example given above is to affirm the relationship between the subject and the predicate. This fundamental purpose or motive on the part of the speaker is termed the *serious intention*.

To describe both these intentions, we use the term *confirmational signification*, for taken together they disclose to us the intention of the speaker and require us to confirm it, not simply to conceive it. Thus we see that a complete statement in addition to its conceptual signification has two confirmational significations:

- A. The intention of usage, because we know that when a speaker utters a statement he intends us to conceptualize the meaning of the words it contains.
- B. The serious intention, which is the primary objective for the sake of which the speaker intended us to conceptualize his words.

Sometimes a statement may not have the second of these two, as happens when a statement is made in jest. It will then have only the first confirmational signification, i.e. the intention of usage, without the motive of affirming the relationship of the predicate with its subject. The confirmational signification is not linguistic, in the sense that it is not an expression of the relationship arrived at by virtue of the process of postulation between the word and its confirmational signification. This is because postulation brings about a connection between conceptualization of the word and conceptualization of its meaning, not between conceptualization of the word and its confirmational signification.

This latter can be deduced only from the state of the speaker. Thus if someone says, while conscious, awake and serious, *truth prevails*, his state will indicate to us that he did not say it in jest or unintentionally, but with a conscious and specific intention. When we hear that same statement, we first conceptualize the linguistic meanings of its subject and predicate by virtue of the causative linguistic bond formed by postulation between the word and its meaning. We next discover the intention of conscious usage in the mind of the speaker from his apparent state. The first represents the conceptual signification and the meaning we conceptualize through it is known as the conceptually or linguistically signified meaning of the word and the statement. The second, i.e. the discovery of the user's intention, represents the confirmational signification; that which is signified is termed the confirmationally signified and is deduced from the state of the speaker.

Therefore on the basis of Qur'anic exegetes, especially Allameh Tabatabai, there are three kinds of signification in total that require widespread reflection to discover the intention of the author. But in Hirsch's Hermeneutics each sentence has just a verbal meaning and another meaning which could be brought in by the interpreter and which does not conform to the author's will.²⁰

The other difference between Hirsch and Allameh Tabatabai concerning the problem of *Wad* is that according to Tabatabai anyone who wishes to employ words and terms, must be the follower, the *Wadi* (The stipulator) and uses that collection of words for making the meaning understood, stipulated by *Wadi* (or in the dictionary). Nobody is allowed to use any word to transfer the meaning to the addressee without paying attention to the philological issues. Since all words have a specific meaning

prior to the stage of their application, one who intends to use them must utilize words that are stipulated by the *Wadi* in that meaning. In this way Allameh Tabatabai, contrary to Hirsch, does not regard the meaning as dependent on the intention of the author but he believes the intention follows precisely the convention of the *Wadi* i.e. the procedure of postulating a word for a specific meaning. Whenever a speaker utters some words and terms, their meaning is based on the linguistic signification, that is to say the same meanings which the *Wadi* had kept in his mind. If the speaker wishes to intend a meaning of the uttered words other than their linguistic meaning, he must bring in *Qarinah* (contextual evidence) to indicate his intention. Otherwise the addressee will deal with the Qur'anic text according to intellectual linguistic principles such as: *Asalat al- haqiqah* (primordially of true meaning)²¹, *Asalat al- umum* (primordially of generality)²², and *Asalat al-itlaq* (primordially of absoluteness).²³

7.3.2. Structure of Language from the Viewpoint of Shi'ite Scholars including Allameh Tabatabai

The general notion about language is that language is a means for communicating mental concepts among people, which is done by the use of verbal position for creating meaning, whether the position is conventional or non-conventional. The first type is allocating a sound for a sense, so that when the sound is used this way, the sense is associated in the mind with no context. This type of position is termed *Wad Ta'yini* (specifying postulation)²⁴ in Jurisprudence. In the second type, however, one is to specify a sound for a sense by the frequency of usage. That means the sound was not primarily set for a particular meaning and there was no relationship whatsoever between sound and sense but people, inevitably, use the sound for a particular meaning within the context. Then for the high frequency and usage of a word, a sort of relationship has developed between sound and sense so that whenever the sound is used for the relevant sense there would be no need for a context.²⁵ As soon as the word is used the meaning comes to the mind of the receiver. This type of position is called *Wad ta'ayyoni* (self-specifying postulation).²⁶

Therefore, sound is as signifier and sense is a signified and what connects the two is an element called *Wad*.. The element is the logical structure, which is of a conventional nature whose knowledge leads us from a knowledge of the sound to

that of its sense. It is said in Logic that signification is a state by which knowledge of something (signifier) leads to knowledge of something else (signified). One type of signification is conventional signification of which sound signifying sense is the most recognized instance.²⁷

According to this perspective, before a speaker utters a word, he has a meaning in mind which is not related to the word. Its existence is divorced from verbal existence, which actually happens before the word or the sound. Mental concepts and meanings are divorced from language. Man uses sound for conveying meaning. Although he could not create the same meaning of the mind, he could create a similar meaning in the mind of the audience by means of sound.

When speaking, what happens on the part of the speaker is usage and on the part of the listener is signification. Usage is the use of sound as it is capable of signifying a particular meaning. First the speaker has a particular meaning in mind. Then he selects the sound which is capable of signifying this meaning, and utters it. When the listener hears the sound, if he is aware of the *Wad* he will reach the meaning through sound. This movement from sound to sense is signification. The speaker has the meaning in mind then he uses the sound; however, the listener first receives the sound then meaning is formed in his mind. This distinction between usage and signification is one drawn by recent Shiite scholars in the Science of Principles of Jurisprudence under a section named *issues of sound*.²⁸

The result is that understanding consists of five elements:

1. Concepts: These exist in the mind of the speaker and audience prior to *Wad*, usage and signification.
2. Sound: They are merely some sounds created in a special way and are the means for expression creating meaning in the mind of the audience.
3. *Wad*: This is an agent which connects sound and sense to each other and facilitates usage and signification.
4. Usage: Considering the *Wad* and the relationship between sound and sense, the speaker first imagines the meaning; then he uses the sound for the meaning. This use of sound for meaning is called usage since it is capable of signifying that meaning.

5. Signification: The audience, based on the *Wad* and the relationship between sound and sense, will first receive the sound, then imagine the meaning. This movement from the sound is called signification.

Therefore, every speaker intends particular meanings by the sounds he utters. Of course, it might be the case that the speaker could not find suitable sounds to express his intended ideas; that is he may make a mistake in the employment of sound for a specific meaning. It is like someone who has just started to learn a language and could not yet understand what sound is set for what meaning. It happens sometimes that even the speaker who has mastered a language could not choose suitable sounds for expressing the intended meaning. On the other hand, the audience too, due to unfamiliarity with the postulation of sounds, could not move from a particular sound to an appropriate meaning.

Nevertheless, such problems do not imply that a speaker has not intended any meaning. Once there is a mistake in usage it would be merely a mistake in the excretion of meaning via sound. In other words, the sound used has not signified the intended meaning. When there is a mistake in signification, it will be a mistake only in discovering the speaker's intention. Thus the audience has not received the intention of the speaker; it does not imply that the speaker had no intention.

Therefore, the correct relationship between speaker and audience and the realization of understanding – in the real sense of the word – is conditioned by correct usage on the part of the speaker and correct understanding or correct signification on the part of the audience. Thus correct or incorrect understanding is measured against the speaker's intention. If the intention was not perceived by the audience, correct and practical understanding would not take place, whether the mistake is that of the audience (correct usage but incorrect signification) or that of the speaker (correct signification but incorrect usage).²⁹

Another element with a basic role in the process of understanding is the intention of the speaker. In other words, in an appropriate semantic understanding drawn in the mind of the audience the meaning should be that intended by the speaker. This basic criterion is an accepted principle in classic and neo-classic hermeneutics. Accordingly, the ultimate meaning of a text is the intention of the author or speaker. Once we recognize the speaker's intention, we actually understand the text;

otherwise, we fail to understand it. Here the scope of the text goes beyond the literal meaning and leads to the figurative meaning as well as hidden devices of literal meaning. Thus it is a good idea to review the types of usage to clarify them from the point of view of Shiite interpreters, so that one could easily compare them to scholars of objective hermeneutics such as Hirsch.

7.3.2.1. Types of Usage

When some sound is set for a particular meaning, that meaning is called the *Mawdu Lahu* (linguistic meaning);³⁰ the use of the sound in that meaning is called *literal meaning*. But sometimes the sound is used in a different meaning other than the set one. This is an acceptable usage. Thus the intended meaning is called the *figurative meaning* and the usage is a *figurative usage*. One could raise a question here: how is the second meaning for which the sound is not set related to the sound and this issue allowed the usage of the sound for that meaning? In response, interpreters, especially Tabatabai, point out that the genuineness of the usage is due to the context, that is there is a sort of relationship between literal and figurative that unites the two. Context is the permit to use the figurative meaning.³¹

When usage is of two types, signification will be the same. That is when the audience hears the sound, the effect of the postulation leads to the literal meaning and from there the figurative meaning is reached. When the human mind moves from sound to a literal meaning, there would be a conventional signification. However, when the literal meaning signifies the figurative meaning; then it is an intellectual issue. This movement is the result of the relationship between these two meanings which are formed in the mind. Knowledge of one leads to knowledge of the other; the two are concomitant.

Anyway, the relationship between sound and literal meaning concerns the “position. However, the relationship between literal meaning and figurative meaning is about the atmosphere which dominates the culture of the speaker and listener.

If the speaker's intention and the concept perceived by the addressee is the same, understanding will take place, that is the addressee understands what is intended by the speaker. This happens provided that usage (on the part of the speaker) and signification (on the part of the addressee) occur appropriately.

Appropriate usage is the one in which the speaker uses the sound for a meaning in an appropriate manner (the sound is capable of the meaning) whether the meaning is literal or figurative. Otherwise, his use would be inappropriate or a wrong usage. Moreover appropriate signification is the one where we move from sound to literal meaning or figurative meaning. Therefore, the movement to meaning that has no relationship to postulation or literal meaning is called a wrong signification.

According to what has been said, it becomes clear that from the perspective of customary and general knowledge of people and a precise logical analysis of the structure of the language, language is other than knowledge. Knowledge and understanding are related to intellectual concepts but language is a special set of sounds related somehow to meanings. There is a signification too for the positioned meaning or in terms of the relationship between the meaning of a subject and another meaning. This point has been discussed in classic Islamic debates, that the relationship between sound and sense could be to such an extent that we face sound in some cases. That is when we are preoccupied with our thoughts – thinking is merely using meanings in the mind – we would still be thinking through sounds. This matter- called *the internal call* by Abu Ali Sina ³² - is not because thinking is dependent on language. (Basically, thinking is the involvement in meanings which are apart from sounds. We can think without sounds and deal merely. with meanings). It is obvious that there is a close relationship between sounds and meanings in the mind so that when we have the meaning in mind, sound will also accompany it. Actually, we realize the meaning in the light of sound. In other words, the relationship between sound and sense increases so that the meaning in the mind of someone who lives in the atmosphere of surrounded by a language is found in the crust of the sounds.

This close relationship between sound and sense eases understanding and speeds up speaking and perception. Whatever sound one hears in an ordinary dialogue indicates the meaning shaped in the mind. Now that the reader is reading this text, he faces the same process. Thus Tabatabai in his discussion of interpretation and jurisprudence believes that sound is meaning, though the two are apparently separate.³³ That is because sound is not knowledge itself but it is a sign for meaning. Signification has a meaning to which our knowledge belongs.

Tabatabai reads the Qur'an and every other text on this basis. The speaker first intends a meaning and then expresses it through sound or writing. In fact, writings are signs for sounds and sounds are signs for meanings. Every writing is a signifier whose signified is sound. Sound too, in turn, is a signifier, signifying meaning. We do not pay attention to the movements due to the great amount of practice we have; but such movement really exists. Therefore, writing is never knowledge itself but merely some signs in the mind of the addressee (who is familiar with the relationship between sound and relevant meaning) that signifies sounds. Sounds are not knowledge, but they are signs for meaning and concepts. Understanding is appropriate when the writer has appropriately used the sound and writing and the reader has also appropriately read the text and shaped a genuine sound and meaning in his mind. If the two sides of the process are correct, understanding will take place while the meaning intended by the writer is transmitted to the reader.

The letters used in the Qur'an are signs for the sounds revealed by God for some intended meaning. When the reader of the Qur'an does not make a mistake in the transmission and reaches the meaning intended by God, he will understand the Qur'an for the deduction of legal precepts, then he realizes that God the Almighty has intended a particular meaning from the sounds. When he reaches the meaning he will approach the truth; otherwise, he will go the wrong way. A mistake by the jurisprudent indicates that God has really willed some other particular meaning by the sounds. Once his understanding complies with them, there will be a correct understanding; otherwise his knowledge will be incorrect.³⁴

7.3.2.2. Semantic Shades of Speech

One semantic element of language and understanding might be the element which is here called *semantic shades of speech*. The meaning of this is that there are other issues beside the speaker's intention. For example, the speaker says something and from his manner of speaking one could say that he is angry. In such a case, although the speaker has not admitted his anger and even sometimes he tries to hide this truth, the perceiver of the speech realizes it. Then how to analyze such meanings? Has sound been used for the meanings (whether it is literal or figurative usage)? Doubtless, there has been no usage for such meanings but there is signification. Therefore, usage and signification have been separated in this case.

Therefore, the semantic shades of speech are different from the literal and figurative meaning and have no role in usage. This meaning is the result of a set of sounds and some other matters such as the state of the speaker, the conditions and the surroundings prevalent at the time of the speech. What is intended in the literal and figurative meaning is the speaker's intention: if the usage is literal the speaker's intention is the literal meaning, and if the usage is figurative the speaker's intention is the figurative meaning. Therefore, the basic element of understanding in such cases is the discovery of the speaker's intention. However, the speaker's intention plays no role in the semantic shades of speech. For example, when it is said about the speech uttered by a person that he has attacked someone or he is angry with someone; or when it is said about a statement made by a politician that he has made the statement due to some political crisis, without doubt in all these cases the expression sometimes does not reflect the intention of the speaker and he has even tried to hide it. Nevertheless, the addressee has such a perception in the context of the atmosphere of his speech, the dominant political norms, and so on.³⁵

This is similar to significance which is expressed by Hirsch as being the opposite of verbal meaning.³⁶ He believes that the verbal meaning of a passage as determined by intensive philological analysis and the significance that the same work may have today are two very different matters.³⁷ According to Hirsch it is merely the verbal meaning that relates to the author's intention not significance. In fact, significance is a sort of interpretation of what was intended by the author, i.e. verbal meaning. For this reason significance is changeable while verbal meaning" would be fixed and unchangeable.³⁸ However, there is a difference between semantic shades of speech and significance in connection with the intention of the author because Allameh Tabatabai states that semantic shades of speech has a relationship to the author's intention while Hirsch opposes such a viewpoint.

7.3.2.3. The Semantic Shades of Speech and the Intention of the Speaker

As a result of what has been said, the speaker sometimes wants to express semantic shades. For instance, by uttering a sentence he both conveys his intention and shows his anger. However, he sometimes attempts to cover it. It is similar to the situation when a person hides his envy but his utterances betray him to the listener. In some other cases, the speaker neither intends to hide the semantic shades nor intends to

reveal them ; in other words, he is indifferent. Sometimes, the speaker is not even aware of this meaning, let alone reveals it, hides it or shows indifference towards it.

What is intended here is the speaker's intention in its general sense. Therefore, the relationship between the speaker's intention and the general meaning, will be like that between the semantic shades and the *general and specific aspect*, to borrow a term from the science of Logic. That is because some of the intentions of the speaker do not belong to the semantic meaning; it is the literal or figurative meaning of the sound. Some other semantic shades do not fit within the framework of the speaker's intentions like those instances when the speaker is not conscious of the semantic shades, he is indifferent to it or tries to hide it. As some of the semantic shades of the speaker's intention, happens when the speech has a semantic shade and the speaker has really meant to convey it. However, the "speaker's intention" sometimes refers to its particular sense which includes only its literal and figurative meaning. It does not include the cases where the speaker has wanted to make the semantic meaning understandable. Then there would be a contrast between the speaker's intention in its specific sense and the semantic sense as a term in Logic; they would be opposite each other.

Therefore, every speech, in terms of the speaker's intention and semantic shades, belongs to one of the following four types:

- Speech includes the speaker's intention and semantic shades as when the speaker utters a sentence to both convey his intention and transmit its semantic shade, such as anger.
- Speech includes only the speaker's intention, without a semantic shade like many of the everyday conversations.
- Speech includes only the semantic shade without the speaker's intention, that is he does not know anything or does not have any intention at all. An example for this case is the speech of a sleeping person, which is without any intention. However, his speech in the context may refer to a signified meaning. Thus from what he says in his sleep we realize that he is afraid of something.
- Speech lacks both, like when a sleeping person is not clear in what he says.

On the other hand, speech falls into three types in terms of the volume of the semantic shades – contrasted against the speaker's intention:

1. The volume of the shades is less than the amount of the speaker's intention. One example is the everyday conversation which lacks semantic shades, or they are less than the intention of the speaker.
2. The volume of the shades is more than the speaker's intention. One example is poetry and specially the *Ghazals* (sonnets) where the intended meaning is less than what we understand from the *Ghazal*.
3. Both in the same amounts. Of course, it is very difficult to determine this matter and say that they are equal in volume with clarity. This happens in some literary works such as novels where shades of the speech keep pace with the intention of the speaker. For example, one who reads a novel realizes the intention of the writer. If he is familiar with the life and ideas of the writer he can understand the semantic shades along with the intended meaning of the writer. It sounds like a novel with two parts: one part is the apparent part which is expressed by the sounds, and then there is the hidden part which is revealed by the context and evidence in the life of the writer.³⁹

The result is that speech has different levels in terms of the speaker's intention and semantic shades. This precision helps us to distinguish, in future, that some issues in hermeneutics show the speaker's intentions in a specific sense. However, some other issues concern the semantic shades while the two – on the part of the speaker's intention – do not follow the same measure. On the other hand, as volume is different in the two cases, one could not introduce a single criterion for both in all cases.

In one sense, the discovery of semantic shades might be regarded as interpretation, which goes beyond the apparent speech and might not be the speaker's intention at all. What interpretation somehow belongs to is the apparent sound and this could be used for discovering the intention of the speaker, which is the same as the literal and figurative meaning of the sound and it enjoys a close relationship to it. However, interpretation concerns the farther, deeper meanings, the ones opposite the apparent, probable or ambiguous meanings, and so on.

7.4. Access to the Final meaning of the text

Allameh Tabatabai maintains that the Holy Qur'an presents us clear and decisive rules which apply to everything and is the most essential text of Islam, expressing numerous regulations in the different aspects of human life and the basic root of the religious materials that make up Islam, i.e. a series of religious ideology as well as ethical and practical rules are found in the Qur'an.⁴⁰ If Qur'anic verses are not understandable decisively, Islamic civil society would be in disarray. Moreover the existence of the thoughtful and decisive laws in Islam are the best proof for the final understanding of the text.

He sees a difference between the Holy Qur'an and other texts in gaining access to a final understanding and how to interpret its different levels. According to his special interpretation, the Qur'an has two levels. It is possible to find the final understanding on one level yet impossible on another one. What the Qur'an says in relation to mankind, in a collection of words and terms, like the Traditions, has a final meaning.⁴¹ So from Allameh Tabatabai's perspective, discovering the final meaning of the text is possible as a whole, i.e. what is related to human beings in the Qur'an in terms of words and traditions, or all other texts whether religious or nonreligious, as scholars of romantic Hermeneutics believe.

Hirsch like Allameh Tabatabai believes that the aim of the interpreter is to acquire a final meaning of the text. He maintains that the real intention of the author is the direct meaning of the text. Not comprehending the text is not good enough for totally denying it. That is why Hirsch stipulates very clearly that the meaning is what is expressed by text, i.e. what the author intended to state with the help of certain signs.⁴² He also emphasises in a definition of Hermeneutics that it is "the modest philological effort to find out what the author meant".⁴³ According to him the only compelling normative principle that has ever been brought forward is the old – fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant.⁴⁴

It is worth mentioning that Romantic Hermeneutics emphasizes the final meaning of the text. As we have seen before, Dilthey stipulates that discovering the final and decisive meaning is possible and he also asserts that Hermeneutics will never be compatible with polyhedron interpretation as well as personal understanding.⁴⁵

The above idea exists in the Islamic texts too. Allameh Tabatabai's frequent discussions concern the introduction of ways to reach the author's intention. As he is one of the most important scholars in the field of Jurisprudence apart from having specialized in philosophy, he took advantage of various discussions including the rules of textual understanding in that subject, which according to its adherents stipulate that two subjects play a crucial role in the correct understanding of a text: discussions regarding the word and the authority.

Tabatabai like other Qur'anic exegetes made reference to the *the authority of apparent meanings*. Since they believe that the Prophet of Islam also used this well-known method, it is acceptable by wise people for the interpretation of the Qur'an and does not necessitate the compilation of a new method. In this way the idea that would be acceptable amongst the hermeneutical perspectives is a view which is harmonious with the apparent meaning of the text. According to Islamic interpreters including Tabatabai, not every understanding of the text (without using any criterion) will be trustworthy. Therefore, we can conclude that to understand the text there is a valid way as well as principles and regulations, most prominent of which is the authority of the apparent meanings of the text.

7.4.1. *Nass and Zahir*

The meaning of the *nass* carries only one possibility. That meaning is clear and there is no doubt as to what is meant – a textually explicit legal statement.

An example from the Qur'an is:

And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and do not produce witnesses (to support their allegations), flog them with eighty stripes and reject their evidence ever after.⁴⁶

In the above verse the word *ever* makes the verse very clear; i.e. do not admit evidence from them *ever*, not just at that point in time.

An example from *hadith* is what we find in a narration which says: "if a person in a state of Ihram for Hajj gets married knowing it is forbidden, then the woman that he marries becomes forbidden (*haram*) for him for ever." Again the same word *ever* is used making it clear that it is not only for that time period.

But *zahir* (apparent), the meaning of this type of text, carries different possibilities, but amongst them there is one that is taken unless there is evidence to show otherwise. For example, in the phrase *he is my brother* the word *brother* can have two meanings: a real, blood brother, having the same father, or a brother in faith or a Muslim brother. From the above two meanings the more obvious one is the former. Generally most rational people (Muslims and non-Muslims) take the more obvious and apparent meaning unless there is evidence to show otherwise. This was the method also at the time of the Prophet and the Imams and because it was never disputed by them, it shows that this approach is acceptable in Islam. Therefore, once the apparent meaning has been clarified, it can be acted upon.⁴⁷

7.4.2. How is the apparent meaning of words created?

The apparent meaning of a word is the meaning that appears in the addressee's mind as soon as he sees the word. The production of such an appearance to words is the result of the relationship between word and meaning. This relationship in its turn is the result of the process of *wad*.

The key point in this respect is to know what kind of meaning a speaker intends and what meaning the addressee understands. Are they free to intend any meaning? As a matter of fact, when a speaker wants to utter words, he should have a meaning in mind that is apparently indicated by them.

Likewise every addressee should arrive at a meaning that is currently understood by other addressees. The reason is that language is a social phenomenon and used for mutual understanding. A wise speaker, who looks for delivering a meaning, has to inspire his addressees with some meaning that is evident to them. This is because there is nothing but the appearance of words in the meaning, for the addressees to reach the speaker's intention. It is obvious that apart from the apparent meaning of the word boundless meanings could be conceived. So, it is inevitable to follow the apparent meaning of the words.⁴⁸

As Qur'anic verses were revealed to all in clear Arabic language, Allameh Tabatabai's main purpose, as already stated, was to interpret the Qur'an using the Qur'an. He strives to get the profound meanings yet at the same time makes an effort to protect the apparent meaning of the Qur'an in order to reach an understanding

which is attributable to the speaker or author with the help of logical methods. As he himself says in this respect:

The Qur'anic verses explain each other, and it is only decisive verses that can clarify the ambiguous ones. Let us repeat the example of the verse 'Looking to their Lord' (75:23); it is ambiguous; but when it is returned to the words of Allah 'Nothing is like a likeness of him' (42:11), and 'Visions comprehend him not' (6:103), it becomes clear that "Looking at" in this phrase means something different from the optical vision connected with the eyes⁴⁹.

He adds:

The verse 4:82 proves that the Qur'an is understandable to common minds and may be pondered and meditated upon; that no verse of it has a meaning that is against the clear dictate of Arabic language; in short, it does not contain puzzles and riddles.⁵⁰

So, it is impossible to exit from the framework of the appearance of the words, otherwise every understanding is attributed to everyone. That's why the importance of Allameh Tabatabai's method in interpreting the Qur'an is paramount, or else attributing an understanding through personal interpretation is so easy.⁵¹

7.5. The authority of apparent meaning

The fundamental aim of Jurisprudence and its principles as well as interpretation of the Holy Qur'an in expressing any discussion regarding the linguistics as well as signification or indication is to discover the intention of the speaker or author. It is evident that the speaker (or author) has the right not to intend an apparent meaning. But he must bring in contextual evidence to indicate his intention, otherwise the apparent meaning or linguistic indication would be read as the speaker's intention. According to Islamic exegetes particularly Allameh Tabatabai *the authority of apparent meaning* is so vital that the authority of Qur'anic verses is associated with it.⁵² The only issue that is directly related to the method of exegesis of the Qur'an will be the discussion of "The authority of apparent meaning"⁵³

When considering legal evidence (*dalil shar'i*) it is not enough to interpret it at the level of its linguistic conceptual signification. It is also necessary to understand it in the context of its conformational signification in order to deduce from it the intention of the Lawgiver. We often find a word to have several linguistic and conventional significations and in order to understand what the speaker intended by uttering it we have recourse to two forms of appearance: first, the apparent meaning of the word at the level of conceptual significations, i.e. the meaning that most immediately suggests itself when one hears the word, as distinct from all other meanings within the realm of linguistic possibility, and second, the apparent state of the speaker suggesting that his intention and choice of meaning from the word is in accordance with the meaning the word has at the level of its conceptual signification. To put it differently, he intends to convey the most immediate of the word's linguistically possible meanings. This is known as "the appearance of congruity between the established meaning of a word and that which the speaker wishes to affirm".⁵⁴

It is an established principle of jurisprudence that the apparent state of the speaker indicating his use of the word in its most immediate sense is authoritative. By this principle is meant that the apparent state is to be taken as a basis for the interpretation of the textual evidence. We consistently assume that the speaker intends to use the word in its most immediate linguistic meaning, basing ourselves on his apparent state. This authority of the two forms of appearance is termed *asalat al-zuhur* (the primacy of appearance), since it assumes them to be the essential principle in the interpretation of the textual evidence.

It can now be appreciated why in the foregoing discussions great emphasis was placed on determining the linguistic signification of a word and its apparent meaning in the general framework of the language, even though what is important in the interpretation of verbal evidence is the meaning intended by the user, not necessarily the word's most immediate lexical meaning. For the principle of the primacy of appearance shows us that a very strong connection exists between discovering the intention of the speaker and determining the most immediate lexical meaning of the word. This principle suggests that the meaning of the word intended by the speaker is in fact identical to its most immediate – i.e. apparent – lexical meaning. In order to understand the intention of the speaker we have to know first the most immediate

lexical meaning of the word, and then to ascertain that it is indeed the meaning intended by the speaker.⁵⁵

7.5.1. The apparent meanings of the Qur'anic verses

Allameh Tabatabai relies on the apparent meaning of Qur'anic verses in numerous instances in his book *Al-Mizan*. For example, in order to weaken some ideas in exegesis of certain verses he states "These kinds of views, regardless of any lack of evidence, do not conform to apparent meaning of the verses".⁵⁶ Likewise he states in the introduction of *Al-Mizan*: "We have never felt any need to interpret a verse against its apparent meaning."⁵⁷

It is worth mentioning that there has been a small group of Shiite scholars who believed that it is not possible to derive the Islamic rulings from the Qur'an itself, because the verses of the Qur'an are very profound in their meaning and often they convey different possibilities. Thus, practically, they believe it is impossible to draw Islamic rulings from the Qur'an without the guidance of the *Sunnah* (Tradition). This group is known as '*Akhbariyyen*' (traditionalists). Among the four sources of Islamic rulings, (Qur'an, Tradition, Intellect and Consensus) the traditionalists just believe in the tradition. Concerning the validity of Intellect they would say it is not appropriate to trust our intellect because of its numerous mistakes. In the case of the Qur'an, they politely state that the Divine Book is greater than what we, ordinary or insignificant individuals, think and it is beyond our understanding. So only the Prophet of Allah and the infallible Imams have the right to contemplate on the Qur'anic verses and attempt an understanding. They interpreted certain verses with the help of the Traditions, which had been narrated from the Messenger of Islam or the infallible Imams. It is very interesting to note that wherever there was a Tradition with regard to a relevant verse they would mention the verse; otherwise, they avoided mentioning it in their books of interpretation, as if the verse did not belong to the Holy Qur'an!⁵⁸

Numerous Islamic scholars and researchers of the Qur'an including Allameh Tabatabai in his *Al-mizan* opposed the traditionalists and replied with the points that follow.

7.5.1.1. Intellectual reasons

- If the Qur'an has been handed down to guide people along the right path and correct their individual or social behaviour and if they are bound to practice the contents of this Divine Book, then it will be meaningless to say that "the Qur'an is not understandable to the people."
- Lack of authority or validity of the apparent meaning of the Qur'an indicates ignorance which is completely undesirable. Obviously this is not the intention of Almighty Allah
- Once we study the Qur'an, we can understand at least part of the verses through our own intellect. Hence it is not wise to claim that Qur'anic verses are not understandable at all.⁵⁹

The fourth reason is based on two premises: the first is that the normative conduct of the Companions of the Prophet of Islam and those of the Imams was based on the apparent meaning of the Book and the *Sunnah* (The tradition), which is indeed confirmed by the historical record of their practice. The second one is that they so acted in the sight and hearing of the Prophet and the Imams, who did not in any way attempt to dissuade them, thus demonstrating that their method was correct. It follows from these two premises that the Legislator approves the disposition to act in accordance with apparent meaning, which establishes in turn the authority of apparent meaning and its state.

7.5.1.2. The Qur'anic and Traditional reasons

The fact is that numerous verses of both the Qur'an and Traditions stipulate the authority of the apparent meaning of the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself very clearly orders us to reflect on its the verses. This clearly contradicts those who maintain that it is not understandable or that the apparent meaning of the verses is not valid. So, it is possible to study the Qur'an and rely on the apparent meanings of the verses. As Allameh Tabatabai underlines:

Moreover, there is not a single verse in the Qur'an whose connotation is against its apparent meaning. A few verses that give such an impression are governed by the decisive verses-and the Qur'anic verses explain each other. Obviously, a meaning based on context and associations cannot be said to be against the apparent meaning; and especially when

the speaker himself declares beforehand that various parts of his speech are all related to each other and should be understood with each other's help, and that no difference can be found in it if one ponders over it. Do they not then meditate on the Qur'an? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82).⁶⁰

The traditions narrated from the Prophet and infallible Imams also recommend us to contemplate on Qur'anic verses. For instance; the Messenger of God said: "Nobody has the right to recite the Qur'an without contemplating on it".⁶¹ Imam Ali (the first Shi'ite imam) stated: "Recitation of the Qur'an without contemplation is of no benefit".⁶² There are other sayings reported from them encouraging us to check their traditions with the Qur'an.⁶³ For example, one of the companions of Imam Sadiq asked him about differences in narrations by those whom we trust and also by those whom we do not. Hearing this, the Imam replied: "Whenever you receive a narration which is borne out by any verse from the Book of God or by an (established) saying of the Prophet, then accept it. Otherwise, the narration is to be left only for the one who has brought it to you." There are also Traditions in which the Imams say: "Whatever we tell you, ask us for its Qur'anic reference."⁶⁴

These Traditions very clearly indicate that the Qur'an is understandable, otherwise how would people know whether or not the tradition conforms to it?

7.5.2. Outward and inward meaning

According to Allameh Tabatabai the Qur'anic verses have an external and internal meaning. Internal meaning in its turn has various levels of meaning. However, at the first step what is important and reliable in exegesis of the Qur'an is the external meaning and then the internal meanings of the verse to discover the intention of God, based on principles and methods of interpretation in different periods. Tabatabai quotes a Tradition in this respect:

It is narrated in *al-Tafsir* of al-Ayyashi from al-Fudayl Ibn Yasar that he said: "I asked Imam Sadeq (a.s.) about this Tradition: 'there is no verse in the Qur'an but it has an exterior and interior, and there is no word in it but it has a boundary, and every boundary has a watching place.' (I asked him) what was the meaning of exterior and interior. The Imam said: 'its exterior is its revelation; and its interior is its interpretation;

some of it has already passed (i. e. happened) and some of it that has not come about yet; it runs along as run the sun and the moon, when a thing of it comes (to its appointed place and time) it happens.⁶⁵

Thereafter he deduces two points, as follows:

It becomes clear that: first, the Qur'an has connotations of varying degrees, which are applied to various groups according to their spiritual perfection. Those who have described the stages of faith in, and love of, Allah, have mentioned even finer applications than those written above. Second, "exterior" and "interior" are relative attributes: every exterior is interior when it seems in relation to a more exterior meaning; and every interior is exterior in comparison to a more interior one.⁶⁶

What does the internal aspect of the Qur'an mean?

Now let us see what is meant by the inward aspect of the Holy Qur'an. One could imagine two kinds of inward aspects for the Qur'an:

The meaning that was never meant by the verse, that is in case we consider the expressions and sentences of the verse or even when we juxtapose the verse with other verses, there would be no such meaning.

For instance, a group of "the people of inner meaning" state what is meant by prayer in the verse "prayer forbids indecency and dishonour" (The Spider: 45) is the Prophet, who prevents the people from indecency and dishonour through the recitation of the Holy Qur'an and his speech. In the same manner, what the Paradise verses imply is nothing but human peace without its responsibilities and pains. This kind of interpretation of the Qur'an is, as the inward aspect of the verses, based on opinion without the least connection to the appearance of the verse. It never signifies the meaning. Opening such a gate to interpreters and researchers would lead to a state of confusion in the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, the religious laws and beliefs.

Therefore, the interpretation which could be mentioned for the inward aspect of the Holy Qur'an that is connected to the appearance and significance of its expressions

would be the collection of probabilities mentioned by interpreters for a verse so that all of them give a wide range of its true meaning.

In other words, the probabilities which do not negate each other and which could be traced back to one source would be the inward aspect of the verse. For instance, each of the Qur'anic interpreters narrates different probabilities for a verse, each being related to the appearance of the verse one way or the other and no one is assigned as the final or definite meaning. Thus there would be no problem if it is described as the intention; what is the clearest would be the outward, while other meanings would be the inward aspect of the verse.

Here the following example is treated by way of remembrance:

Abraham in his argument with the worshippers of celestial bodies insists on the rise and setting of the bodies and asserts: "The morning star, the moon and the sun all rise and set; so they could not be my Lord and the Lord of the people." Thus the Holy Qur'an asserts on his behalf: "when night spread over him he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set he said, I love not the setters."⁶⁷ Abraham states : "The rising and setting of the star is completely in contradiction with the sovereignty of God." This reasoning might be explained in various ways so that all of them are different forms of a single meaning. Following is the explanation of his reasoning in three different forms:

- A. The God of man, as He controls fate, should constantly monitor him and his states. The celestial bodies, out of view beyond the horizon, put an end to the relationship with their servants. Thus they would not have the ability to engineer and direct earthly creatures.
- B. The rising and setting of the celestial bodies show that they are conquered; as if another being takes them away and brings them back again; a conquered being having submitted to the conquerer could not possibly play the role of the Lord since he is a chained being, following orders. The Lord of man is supposed to be a superior being who has conquered everything including the celestial bodies.
- C. The movement of these bright bodies like other movements would not be aimless. Since there is an aim behind the movement, naturally it is not perfect

rather needs something. So, how could the object which moves and is in need respond to and satisfy the needs of earthly creatures?

If every one of the three interpretations complements the other and all of them incorporate a wide range of a single meaning emphasized by Abraham, it might be called the inward aspect of the verse and regard the verses on the reasoning of Abraham as witness to them. In many verses the interpreters narrate different probabilities. Incidentally, there is evidence for each of the probabilities in the verse. This shows that the verse is especially magnificent in terms of significance since it includes these probabilities and at the same time all probabilities could be true and hold firm.⁶⁸

Allameh Tabatabai writes:

It is narrated in the *Tafsir Al-Safi* that Imam Ali (a.s.) said: ‘there is no verse but it has four meanings: manifest, and esoteric, and boundary and rising (or watching) place. So, the manifest is the recitation, and esoteric is the comprehension, and boundary is the commandments of lawful and unlawful, and rising (or watching) place is the divine purpose, expected of the servant through this verse.’

He makes a comment in the interpretation of the above Tradition:

“Recitation” is counted as one of the meanings; it shows that this word refers to the apparent meaning of the verse. Then “comprehension”, which is given as its opposite, would mean the inner (esoteric) meaning hidden behind the apparent one; “the commandments of lawful and unlawful” refers to that Qur’anic knowledge which one acquires in its first or intermediate stages; thus it stands face to face with the “rising (or watching) place” which is the highest grade of the meaning. Probably, the boundary and the rising place are relative terms, as the manifest and the esoteric are – thus every higher grade may be called a rising place in comparison to a lower level.⁶⁹

He concludes:

In the light of the above given discourse, the four terms may be explained in the following way :

The exterior is the manifest meaning that is understood from the words of the verse. The interior is the esoteric meaning, which is hidden behind the manifest one. It may be one or more – one behind the other – nearer to the manifest one or distant, with or without any intermediate link. The boundary is the meaning, whether the exterior or the interior. The rising place is that meaning from which the boundary (as explained above) arises. In other words, it is the esoteric meaning that is immediately adjacent to the boundary.⁷⁰

7.5.3. Similarity of internal meaning to Significance

There is a similarity between the internal meaning of the Qur'an (as Allameh Tabatabai defines) and Hirsch's theory regarding Significance.

Hirsch states:

“Verbal meaning relates to the inside of the text and the author's consciousness; however *Significance* is always turned towards the outside of the text.”⁷¹

As a matter of fact, whenever one considers the relationship between the verbal meaning and its external issues one enters into a discussion of Significance. When we analyse or examine the text and put a question to it or make it conform to a particular condition, in reality we are dealing with Significance not Verbal meaning, although various interpretations of a text fall within the framework of Significance but Verbal meaning will stay constant. He continues:

If a meaning can change its identity and in fact does, then we have no norm for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders.⁷²

This is precisely Hirsch's point: endless confusion is created by lumping together Verbal meaning and Significance, and this sin he ascribes to Gadamer, Bultmann and the theologians of the New Hermeneutics.⁷³

The objective of Hermeneutics is not to find the significance of a passage for us today but to make clear its verbal meaning. Hermeneutics is the philological discipline which sets forth the rules by which valid determinations of the verbal meaning of a passage may be achieved.⁷⁴

This view is conformable to Shi'ite interpretations, particularly those issues which are related to the internal meaning of the Qur'anic verses. As Allameh Tabatabai underlines, a verse might have several different layers, based on divergent conditions.

This, in short, gives a glimpse of the differences of opinions concerning the explanations of the words and clauses of the verse. There are still more differences about the event referred to, whether it narrates an actual happening or is just a parable; and so on and so forth. Compute the differences mentioned above and you will get nearly one million, two hundred and sixty thousand possible explanations ($4 \times 3^9 \times 2^4$). It seems an astounding quality of the Qur'an, that a verse that is subjected to so many divergent interpretations, still maintains its highest standard of eloquence; that in spite of all these vagaries of the exegetes, its meaning is not disjointed, nor its beauty marred.⁷⁵

He makes reference to a saying of Imam Ali: "The Qur'an is a book, covered between two flaps and it does not speak. It should therefore necessarily have an interpreter. Men alone can be such interpreters."⁷⁶ He also states: "It is the Qur'an. If you ask it to speak it will not do so."⁷⁷ It is obvious that making the Qur'an speak means that the Qur'an needs to be unveiled, which refers to Qur'anic interpretation. The statement *It will never speak* means we should actually try to comprehend and therefore understand the meaning of its words and message.⁷⁸

However, the difference between Hirsch's theory about Significance and Allameh Tabatabai's view concerning the internal meaning of the Qur'an is that according to Hirsch Significance will be outside any discussion of Hermeneutics while Tabatabai puts it in. Basically he believes that Significance would be effective in discovering the intention of the author as well as playing the best role in uncovering the meaning

of the text. Yet sometimes it is necessary to look at the text from the point of view of modern sciences to find out the internal meaning of the Qur'an.

7.5.4. Valid apparent meaning

Certain human sciences have an effective influence on some apparent meanings of the words and statements. For instance once we say "the sun will rise" we mean the earth rotates around the sun. Yet the ancients meant the sun rotated around the earth. In another example, when someone observes Allah swears to the sun in the Qur'an⁷⁹, if one is living in the fifth century he would understand that Allah sworn to the bright globe which rotates around the earth and whose bulk is 160 times that of the earth. However this verse is understood by contemporary people as contrary to the past understanding, i.e. Allah sworn to the magnificent globe which is a compressed gas and its temperature reaches 20 million degrees - like an atomic furnace - and the earth rotates around it.

According to Shiite exegetes, in such instances we cannot conclude that the apparent meaning of the words *sun* has changed; linguistically speaking, is the luminous body observed in the sky. Different features of the luminous body i.e. being a magnificent globe or rotating the earth and so on, have no role in altering the meaning of the *sun* to a new one.⁸⁰

7.6. Fundamental presuppositions of the authority of apparent meanings

There are some presuppositions with regard to the authority and validity of apparent meaning which can be comparable with Hirsch's Hermeneutical view:

7.6.1. The existence of real meaning

The most basic presupposition before the Shiites in the field of jurisprudence as well as exegesis of the Qur'an about the validity of apparent meaning is to extract the real meaning or intention of the author in a text. Allameh Tabatabai stipulated the matter in many cases in his works particularly in *Al-mizan*. As he states:

No one can find a single verse in the Qur'an whose words or phrases are bereft of meaning. Every verse points to its true meaning – either it is

the only meaning understood by an Arabic speaking person, or is one of several meanings which may be inferred from it. When a verse is ambiguous and can be interpreted in more than one way, the true meaning is surely one of those interpretations.⁸¹

This presupposition is raised in jurisprudence in the section on words as well as all the interpretive discussions of the Qur'an. It shows the existence of the real meaning has been already considered as a decisive thing. As a matter of fact, if this presupposition collapses, the process of *Ijtihad* (intellectual reasoning) and attempts to infer religious rules from two vital sources, i.e. The Qur'an and Traditions, would be transformed. There is a sort of consensus amongst Muslim scholars in relation to discovering the intention of Allah in Qur'anic verses as well as the intention of the Prophet in the Traditions. If sometimes there are disputes between certain groups of Muslim scholars, it is on the subject of how to discover the author's intention.

Hirsch also insists that it is the interpreter's duty to find out what the author meant:

As soon as anyone claims validity for his interpretation, he is immediately caught in a web of logical necessity. If his claim to validity is to hold, he must be willing to measure his interpretation against a genuinely discriminating norm, and the only compelling normative principle that has ever been brought forward is the old-fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant.⁸²

7.6.2. The possibility of controlling presupposition

Modern Hermeneutics emphasize: prejudgments are not something we must or can dispense with; they are the basis of our being able to understand history at all. Hermeneutically, this principle can be stated as follows: there can be no "presuppositionless" interpretation. A biblical, literary, or scientific text is not interpreted without preconceptions.⁸³

According to the Shi'ite exegetes the existence of presupposition is natural, but it should be stabilized, since certain presupposition not only fails to prevent us from understanding the reality but also will also help us to find out the intention of the author.

As a matter of fact Qur'anic interpreters in general and Allameh Tabatabai in particular do not deny the role of presupposition in understanding Qur'anic verses. They also believe that not only it is possible to control presuppositions and the mental expectations in understanding a text, but also many Muslim scholars have been successful in controlling such presuppositions.

7.6.3. Control of presuppositions in recognition of *conceptual indication*

At the stage of the *conceptual indication*, it would be sufficient to be familiar with the literal meaning and there is no need to locate presuppositions or modern sciences - on the contrary, the existence of any kind of philosophical, theological and scientific presupposition could not be regarded as the best understanding in this phase.

Allameh Tabatabai says:

Such exegesis should be called adaptation, rather than explanation. There are two ways of explaining a verse. -One may say: 'What does the Qur'an say?' Or: "How can this verse be explained, so as to fit into my belief?" The difference between the two approaches is quite clear. The former forgets every pre-conceived idea and goes where the Qur'an leads him. The latter has already decided what to believe and cuts the Qur'anic verses to fit that body; such an exegesis is no exegesis at all.⁸⁴

The understanding should be formed through the text, not by means of imposing self – personal views on it, which is prohibited in Islamic exegesis. Tabatabaei emphasises:

They impose the results of academic or philosophic arguments on the Qur'anic meanings; they make the Qur'an conform to an extraneous idea. In this way, explanation turns into adaptation, realities of the Qur'an are explained away as allegories and its manifest meanings are sacrificed for so-called "Interpretation".⁸⁵

7.6.4. Control of presuppositions in recognition of conformational indication

Here we should benefit from determined presuppositions which originate from common knowledge of all languages. If we cannot expurgate or formulate these presuppositions and are unable to use them in a correct manner, then we would not be able to reach a correct understanding from this stage of indication. Most of the discussions with regard to 'Words' in Jurisprudence and also of Logic, as well as certain preliminary discussion concerning Exegesis of the Qur'an, have all been done in order to correct this sort of presupposition. For this phase of indication, there is no need to refer to any human sciences, rather only common rational conventions between all languages playing the role of fundamental presuppositions should be taken and the exegete of the Qur'an should wipe anything else out of his mind.

7.6.5. Control of presuppositions in recognition of serious conformational indication

Interpreters of the Qur'an must consider all verbal and non-verbal contextual evidence during exegesis of the text. All external factors and decisive intellectual rulings as well as some kinds of definite human sciences should be regarded as presuppositions in the process of the final discovery of meaning. In Jurisprudence a *Faghih* (jurisprudent) is allowed to issue a *fatwa* (religious decree) as soon as he arrives at a dead end in his attempt to find more contextual evidence after striving to discover the whole contextual evidence in connection with the serious conformational indication. He cannot rely on suspicious reasons in discovering the real meaning as the most important purpose of a jurisprudent is to reach the decisive understanding of the Qur'an and Traditions.. In other words, it is definitely possible to attribute something to the Qur'an and the Traditions. So it might be stated that the first specification of the religious understanding is that it could not be contained within a framework of suspicious understanding. For it is forbidden to attribute non - decisive points to the Qur'an and the Traditions. That is why we must be confident that there is no obstacle in the way of finding the real meaning. Therefore, it is possible to control the presuppositions at this stage as it is very clear for a Muslim scholar what category of knowledge should be used in this phase.

7.6.6. Background of understanding during the age of the Prophet

According to Allameh Tabatabai, one of the most important factors of the authority of apparent meaning is its existence in the early days of Islam. He claims that the Prophet's contemporaries and the infallible Imams who were speaking the same language could not understand the religious statements and just those of the next generations have been able to come to an appropriate understanding of the apparent meaning of Qur'anic or Traditional terms and words, so in this situation the most important basis for the authority of apparent meaning would not be demonstrable.

The existence of such grounds is the most significant pillar of *Ijtihad* (intellectual reasoning) as well as the authority of the Qur'an and the Traditions. No Islamic scholar is against this principle. For *Ijtihad* in Islamic texts means the achievement of correct understanding of the text as earlier addressees used to perceive. It is worth mentioning that the early addressees would perceive the meaning of religious text on the basis of their intellectual ability and realm of knowledge. Religious texts extend beyond time and place; that is why the early addressees only understood one layer of meaning of the texts. New layers of meaning would be explored during the course of history. In this way, the Jurisprudent and the Exegete can penetrate through the layers of statements and messages right to the core.⁸⁶

One of the most important elements, in connection with the above title, which plays an important role in inferring religious instructions, is *Fahm-e-orfi* (understanding of the masses or the common people). For Divine messengers were raised amongst people to speak with them and expose the realities. As the Qur'an says: *We sent not an apostle except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them.*⁸⁷ It is obvious that explaining realities to the people make it necessary to speak in a way that is familiar to them as they are the addressees of religious rules and whilst they do not understand the intention of the Messenger, they would not be able to obey instructions. For this reason understanding of religious statements by the next generations depends on appropriate recognition of the general circumstances or specific situations of their time of issue and interpreters attempt to analyze religious reasons based on the common meaning perceivable at the time of the Divine Messenger. In this way a jurisprudent or interpreter has no right to regard

his personal understanding as the common understanding and to rely on his philosophical or scientific ideas instead of what is a common understanding.⁸⁸

7.6.7. Reconstruction of the horizon of issuing religious statement

The last presupposition, which is necessary to prove the authority of apparent meaning, is to perceive and discover the apparent meaning of the verses or Traditions at the time when they were issued.. The exegete of the Qur'an must be able to reconstruct the specific atmosphere of the time and of the Prophet or Imam's conversation. Nowadays this presupposition is denied by modern Hermeneutics. They maintain that it is impossible to gain access to the real surroundings of the speaker and what he stated.

They believe that the aim of interpretation is not fundamentally to reach the intention of the author. In fact, neither the author nor the early addressee of the text would be able to limit the horizon of textual meaning. Basically the meaning of the text must be considered regardless of the author's intention.⁸⁹ Likewise they regard the understanding and interpretation as "productive", i.e. producing new meaning during the process of the interpretation of the text. However, presupposition or subjectivity of the interpreter as well as the text itself shares in the production of the meaning.⁹⁰ While scholars of traditional Hermeneutics maintain that the purpose of interpretation is to find out the author's intention,. it is the interpreter's duty to reconstruct the horizon of the author. As David Couzens Hoy writes in this respect:

Traditional nineteenth - century hermeneutics theory (Schleier, Macher, Dilthey) considers understanding to be a process of psychological reconstruction. The object of understanding is the original meaning of a text handed down to the present from a past that is no longer immediately accessible. Reconstruction – which can take place only when there is a bridge between past and present, between text and interpreters – is psychological when this bridge consists of a relation between two persons: the author and the reader. For Dilthey, the text is the "expression" of the thoughts and intentions of its author; the interpreter must transpose himself into the author's horizon so as to relive the creative act. The essential link between author and reader, no matter how great the time difference, is a common humanity, a common

psychological makeup or generic consciousness that grounds the intuitive ability to empathize with another person⁹¹

According to Dilthey, the interpreter removes the historical gap which is separating him from the world of the text, in a way to become contemporary with the author's world.⁹²

Hirsch maintains the interpreter's primary task is to reproduce in himself the author's logic, his attitudes, his cultural surroundings in short, his world. Even though the process of verification is highly complex and difficult, the ultimate verifiable principle is very simple: the imaginative reconstruction of the subject who is speaking.⁹³

Hirsch's view and traditional Hermeneutics in general conform to Allameh Tabatabai and almost all Shi'ite exegetes. For Shi'ite interpreters if we wish to understand the words of the Prophet of Islam or infallible Imams, then we need to place ourselves in the time of those who were addressed by them. All discussions on Jurisprudence are related to this issue. For this reason it is acceptable by Jurisprudence.

Almost all jurists and exegetes believe that reconstruction of the prevailing circumstances of the speaker's time is possible. The major efforts in the process of inferring religious instructions in reality, are spent in reconstructing those early days of Islam, although they differ from each other in achievement of the real aim.

Allameh Tabatabaei stipulates that the verse 4:82, proves that the Qur'an is understandable to common minds and may be pondered and meditated upon: that no verse of it has a meaning that is against the clear dictate of Arabic language; in short, it does not contain puzzles and riddles⁹⁴.

Therefore, an interpreter should assume that what he understands of Qur'anic verses now, has the same meaning that was understood by the early addressees – what they understood as the apparent meaning of the verses. So there is no difference between them and us in understanding the apparent meaning.

Qur'anic researchers and jurists take three fundamental steps to achieve the apparent meaning at the time of the issuance of religious instructions: First of all, they strive to discover the general and common rulings with regard to understanding

of apparent meaning in all languages. For the second step, they embark on a historical analysis of anthropology and sociology at the time when the words were issued. The final step is an examination of the statements in the light of the time and place, based on the prevailing circumstances of the time of the addressee. These three steps could be regarded as three stages of the Hermeneutical process towards an achievement of the intention of the religious lawmaker.⁹⁵

¹ Palmer, Richard E., *Hermeneutics*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, P.60.

² *Al-Mizan*, Vol 1, P.3.

³ *Ibid*, Vol, 10, P.43.

⁴ Bahrami, Mohammad, the article of *Hermeneutics va danesh Tafseer*, Journal of "Pejuheshaye Qur'an" No. 21-22, P.163.

⁵ The Holy Qur'an, 4:82.

⁶ *Ibid*, 38:29.

⁷ *Taseir ibn kaseir*, Vol, 1, P. 5.

⁸ *Al-mizan*, Vol, 5, P. 112.

⁹ *Truth and method*, P.306,360.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, P. 193.

¹¹ *Ibid*, P. 372.

¹² Hadavi, Mahdi, *Mabani kalami Ijtihad*, P.248-49.

¹³ *Validity in interpretation*, P. 142, 225, 26.

¹⁴ Tabatabaei, Mohammad Hossein, *Hashiyat-al-kifayeh*, P.16-17.

¹⁵ *Majalleh pjouheshhaye Qur'ani*, No.21-22, Marefat, Mohammad Hadi, p. 274.

¹⁶ Al-Sadr, Muhammad Baqir, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Translated by Arif Abdul Hussain, Edited by Hamid Algar and Sa'eed Bahmanpour, p.63-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 64-5

¹⁸ Mokhtari, Mohammad Hossein, *Osool Fegh*, P. 11.

¹⁹ *Validity in interpretation*, P. 142.

²⁰ *Ibid*, P. 144.

²¹ All scholars hold that unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise, the true (literal) meaning of the text should be assumed, as this is the method of the rational human.

²² This principle applies to the case where one doubts if a general meaning is meant or a specific one. In this case, one must assume generality unless there is evidence to show otherwise.

²³ This principle applies to the case where one doubts whether the ruling at issue is meant to be absolute or conditional. In this case, one must assume the former unless there is evidence to show otherwise.

²⁴ Specifying postulation, in which a postulator stipulates a specific word for a specific meaning.

²⁵ Mokhtari, Mohammad Hossein, *Osool Fegh*, Tehran, Anjuman Ghalam, Iran, P.12.

²⁶ Self-specifying postulation, in which a word is postulated for a meaning because of natural or accidental correlation.

²⁷ Al-Mozaffar ,Muhammad Reza, *Al-Mantiq*, p.36.

²⁸ Sadr ,Sayyed Muhammad Baqir , *Bohouth fi Elm al-Osoul [Research on Science of Fundamentals]*, Vol. I, p.131.

²⁹ Hadavi Tehrani , Mahdi, *Mabani-e Kalami Ejtehad [Theological principles of Personal Systematic Reasoning]*, Kherad Publications, Qum, 2003, pp.95-97.

³⁰ The first person or persons who produced and spoke the language specified particular words for a particular meaning, as a result of which words acquired a relationship with meanings and each word came to indicate its own particular meaning. That specification process practiced by those first people among whom the word-meaning nexus arose may be termed 'postulation' (*Wad*) and its practitioner 'postulator' ;(*Wadi* '); the word is the 'postulated' (*al-mawdu*) and the meaning indicated by it is 'that for which it was postulated' (*al-mawdu' lahu*).

³¹ Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussein , *Hashyat al-Kifaya* p.21.

³² Ibid, p.21.

³³ Ibid, p. 19.

³⁴ Hadavi Tehrani , Mahdi, *Mabani-e Kalami Ejtehad [Theological principles of Personal Systematic Reasoning]*, Kherad Publications, Qum, 2003, pp.101-3.

³⁵ Ibid, pp.107-8.

³⁶ Hirsch, Eric.D, *The aims of interpretation*, PP.2-3.

³⁷ Palmer, Richard E. , *Hermeneutics*, P.60.

³⁸ *Validity in interpretation*, PP.7-10.

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- ³⁹ *Mabani Kalami Ejtehad*, pp.108-110.
- ⁴⁰ Tabatabai, Mohammad Hossein, *Qur'an dar Islam*, P. 3.
- ⁴¹ *Al-Mizan*, Vol 3, P.60-62.
- ⁴² *Validity in interpretation*, P.135.
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, P.57.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, P.26.
- ⁴⁵ W.Dilthey, selected writings, edited by H.P.Richkman.Cambridge, u.p, 1976, pp.331-33.
- ⁴⁶ The Holy Qur'an , 14:4.
- ⁴⁷ Shomali, Mohammad Ali, *Principles of Jurisprudence*, P.36-37.
- ⁴⁸ Larijani,Sadeq, *Mrefat deni*, P.160-61.
- ⁴⁹ *Al-mizan*, Vol,3,P.67.
- ⁵⁰ *Abid* ,vol,3,P.73.
- ⁵¹ *Marefat Dini*, P.141.
- ⁵² Hosseini Tehrani, Sayyed Mohammad Hossein, *Negareshi bar maghale Bast va Qabz Teoric Shareat*, P.197
- ⁵³ Khurasani, Akhund ,*Kefayat-al usool* ,P.220.
- ⁵⁴ Al-Sadr, Muhammad Baqir, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 87.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.88.
- ⁵⁶ *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 10.PP.287, 444.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid* ,Vol. 1, P.15.
- ⁵⁸ Motahhari, Mortaza, *Shenakht Qur'an*, P.25.
- ⁵⁹ Taheri,Habibollah, *Darsayei az Aloom Qur'ani* ,Vol.1,P.79.
- ⁶⁰ *Al-mizan*,Vol.5,P.57.
- ⁶¹ *Noor al- saqhalain*, Vol,1,P.35.
- ⁶² *osul al- Kafi*, Vol,3, Babo Fazl al- elm,Bab Sefat al- ulama.
- ⁶³ Tabatabaei, Mohammad Hossein, *Qur'an Dar Islam* Vol,67.
- ⁶⁴ Shomali, Mohammad Ali, *Principles of Jurisprudence* P. 25.
- ⁶⁵ *Al-Mizan*, Vol, 5, P.106.
- ⁶⁶ *Abid* , Vol, 5, P.107.
- ⁶⁷ The Holy Qur'an, 2: 76.
- ⁶⁸ *Special Journal of the Divine Word*, vol. 24, pp. 111-2.
- ⁶⁹ *Al-Mizan*, Vol, 5, P.108.

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- ⁷⁰ Abid , Vol, 5, P.109.
- ⁷¹ *Validity in interpretation*, PP.7, 10.
- ⁷² Ibid , P. 46.
- ⁷³ Palmer, Richard, *Hermeneutics*, P. 60.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, P. 61.
- ⁷⁵ *Al-mizan*, Vol, 2, P. 17.
- ⁷⁶ *Nahj Al Balaghah*, sermon No 125.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, No 158.
- ⁷⁸ Zanjani, Amid, *Mabani va raveshhaye Tafsire Qur'an*, P.285.
- ⁷⁹ The Holy Qur'an , 91:1.
- ⁸⁰ Hadavi, Mahdi, *Bavarha va porseshha* P.167-68.
- ⁸¹ *Al-mizan*, Vol, 5, P.30.
- ⁸² *Validity in interpretation*, P. 26.
- ⁸³ Palmer, Richard, *Hermeneutics*. P.182.
- ⁸⁴ *Al-mizan*, Vol, 1,P.6.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid, P. 6.
- ⁸⁶ Zanjani,Amid, *Mabani va Raveshhaye Tafseer Qur'an*,P.280.
- ⁸⁷ The Holy Qur'an , 14:4.
- ⁸⁸ *Magazine of Keyhan Andisheh* No,48,Article of *Karbod orf dar istenbat*, Rajabi,Hossein.
- ⁸⁹ *Truth and method*, P.372-73.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid, P.296.
- ⁹¹ *The Critical Circle*, P, 11.
- ⁹² Ahmadi,Babak,*Sakhtar va Ta'vile Matn*, P.537.
- ⁹³ Ibid, P. 12.
- ⁹⁴ *Al- mizan*, Vol, 5 P. 70.
- ⁹⁵ *Maghalh RabeteH osool fegh va mabani fahm feghi ba manashenasi va Hermeneutics*, P.15-16.

Chapter eight: Gadamer's Ideas in the light of Allameh Tabatabai's Viewpoint

8.1. Introduction

Hirsch devotes the second appendix of the book *Validity in interpretation* to the criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutic ideas; he has elaborated on and evaluated Gadamer's most important viewpoints in this. Doubtless, Hirsch concentrated his intellectual efforts to reject philosophical hermeneutics in this book and another entitled *The Aims of Interpretation*. Heidegger and then Gadamer are the greatest figures in philosophical hermeneutics; the latter is the defender of "relativism" in the process of understanding and comprehension. Allameh Tabatabai, like Hirsch, is a defender of "objectivism". He has founded his interpretation of the Qur'an on the same principles. Throughout his interpretation, as already mentioned, he emphasizes the possibility of objective and fixed understanding of the work, and regards textual meaning independent of the interpreter and relevant to the author's intention. He also admits the possibility of achieving true and objective meaning and of realizing fixed, valid and permanently true issues in his own philosophical and interpretive books with due attention to acceptance of objectivism as a logical inclination.

Allameh Tabatabai and Hirsch are both objective in this regard and both have written criticism which is relatively common on philosophical hermeneutics or Gadamer. This chapter is an attempt to criticize Gadamer's hermeneutic theories according to Tabatabai's interpretive and philosophical principles, which are among the outstanding ideas and theories of Hirsch and Tabatabai. It is necessary to think about the common grounds between the two intellectuals about criticism of Gadamer's ideas.

First let us look at some points expressed by Gadamer concerning the hermeneutic experience in general, and textual interpretation in particular, followed by a criticism.

8.2. Overlooking Intention of Author

Gadamer does not believe in the author's presence in the text, imagining instead an independent world. Although he frees the text from dependence on the author, he does not allow it semantic meaning but he involves the reader. Text, from Gadamer's viewpoint, is not a manifestation or expression of the author's mentality,¹ but a subject that converses with the interpreter. In this conversation, it is the conditions of the interpreter that determine the main situation for understanding the text.

The meaning of conversation is of great consequence in Gadamer's attitude since the conversation itself basically gives expression to the implication that a representation of truth has already been accepted by the reader and he could possess a portion of the truth. Gadamer, like ancient Greek philosophers, thinks of everyone as a sceptic. Doubtless, there is no "pure truth". Therefore, there could be no final interpretation which is fixed and single. Each meaning, which is apparently true, is an interpretation deduced by the reader's questioning. Thus it becomes clear that the interpretation belongs to his semantic horizon.²

Gadamer does not acknowledge the hermeneutic mission as understanding of the author's intention. However, apart from the author's mentality, understanding the meaning of the text is related to the interaction between the interpreter and the text. He insists that the meaning of the text, in general, goes beyond the intention of the author. The mission of understanding, in a strict sense, is related to the meaning of the text itself.³ Gadamer does not intend to study the author's mind to illustrate the process which has led to the creation of the text. This, he assumes, is beyond the task of the interpreter, as the responsibility of the interpreter is to look for the meaning of the text.⁴ According to Gadamer the aim of early readers (those present at the time of the creation of the text and thus the major target of the text) is not the realization of the author's intention either; they could not limit the semantic horizon of the text, because only then the text is exposed to new communications. This matter paves the way for fresh meanings. This possibility of new communication only occurs when freedom and independence from the author and the original audience is achieved.⁵

The author, according to Gadamer, is one among other interpreters of the text, whose understanding and interpretation do not enjoy any priority over other understandings

and interpretations. Other interpreters are not bound by his interpretation. Thus the author's intention is not a determining force in the process of understanding.⁶ As Gadamer writes:

Hermeneutics ought never to forget – that the artist who creates something is not the appointed interpreter of it. As an interpreter he has no automatic authority over the person who is simply receiving his work. Insofar as he reflects on his own work, he is own reader. The meaning that he, as reader, gives his own work does not set the standard. The only standard of interpretation is the sense of his creation, what it “means”.⁷

Therefore, Gadamer and modern hermeneutics in general with an audience-oriented attitude to the text examine the unsaid in the reader's mind and not the writer's mind. In other words, the pivot of understanding the text is the interpreter and the author's intention has no role in its understanding. Thus they renounce the possibility of a final understanding for a text, and emphasize the fluidity and changeability of understanding. Therefore, the interpreter-oriented attitude towards textual understanding is paramount among their hermeneutic principles.

8.2.1. Romantic Hermeneutics and Shiite Interpretations

While Romantic Hermeneutics is author-oriented and attempts to achieve the author's intention from the text, Bultman writes about Schliermacher in an article on his hermeneutics:

He asserts that the unity and coherence of a work is not realized merely through the analysis of a formalistic logic and style but should be captured as a moment in the life of its author. In other words, the interpreter should understand not only "the external form" but also "the internal form". The latter form is the one about an "invisible" and mental interpretation and not an objective one. Therefore, interpretation is a "renovation" or "recreation", fully and permanently connected to the process of literary production itself.⁸

According to Wilhelm Delthey, the interpreter removes the historical distance – which separates him from the world of the text. Somehow he becomes a contemporary of the author. Based on the theory of Schliermacher, expressed more

perfectly in Dilthey's theory of objectivism, the present conditions of the interpreter are of negative value and are to be denied. The same conditions might be regarded as the source of all misunderstandings and shortcomings. Historical knowledge is to overcome all present presuppositions and to realize the horizon of the author's ideas.⁹

Therefore, following Chladenius and Schliermacher, Dilthey introduces the significant role of "historical signs" in the process of interpreting the text. He believed that to understand the text there should be a sort of synchronization between interpreter and author. The two have to synchronize and that the interpreter has to feel himself a contemporary of the author.

Shiite scholars also accept this theory. That is, if one wants to understand, for instance, statements by the sixth Shiite Imam, Imam Sadiq (A.S), he or she has to feel a contemporary of the Imam. All pronunciation issues in the Science of Principles are based on this matter. Shiite jurisprudence, thus, accepts the rule that when one comprehends a Tradition in a sense not grounded at the time of its initiation, and it is a meaning made possible by human development and cultural grounds, that meaning will definitely not be the meaning intended by the Imam.

What August Boeckh (1785-1867) believes that the interpretation of the text concentrated on hermeneutic issues actually follows Schliermacher's work (1768-1834) where there is a correspondence between the concept of the necessity of "historical signs"¹⁰ in interpretation of the text especially interpreting a text emphasized by Schliermacher on the one hand and interpretive and fundamental issues of Shiite scholars on the other. A brief comparison between the two theories will show how August Boeckh regards examining historical signs essential in interpretation and neglecting them not allowed. To respond to this question, examining historical signs incorporates two aspects:

- Examining cases involved in the meaning of the text and the manifestation of its message, and recommended by August Boeckh for interpretation of the text.
- Examining phenomena and signs not effective in discovering the author's intention, but effective in discovering the semantic shades of meaning together with the relevant non-textual matters.

"Why has the author said such a thing?" "What roles have the social, spiritual or moral conditions of the author played in the creation of his work?" Answers to such questions could not be found in interpretation but they might be looked for in criticism. Hirsch, of course, has emphasized this element.

To compare, now, the theory of August Boeckh and that of Shiite interpreters, particularly Tabatabai, one could say: there is a gap of more than one thousand years between Islamic sources and the present day. If one intends to understand the sources he or she should fill in that gap in time. The major need of Shiite scholars of the issues of the Science of Fundamentals, essentially, stems from this gap in time. It is relevant to quote a statement by the Iraqi grand jurisprudent Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (from Najaf): the more we proceed, in terms of time, we will be more in need of the Science of Fundamentals of Jurisprudence. That is why those of the past used to pay attention to the Principles of jurisprudence. However, historically, as the time passed the Science of Principles gained more weight and incorporated broader issues.¹¹ Thus by means of special interpretive issues which falls within the scope of pronouncement of the Science of Principles, one should uncover the pronouncement manifestation and customary meanings in the Arabic language of the era. Thus one gets closer to the time of the initiation of the Traditions. To be more precise, the cultural horizon of the interpreter has been gradually distanced from the cultural horizon of the time the Traditions were formed. Thus there should be a bridge to connect the two cultures. Therefore, "the problem of the pronouncement" in the Science of Fundamentals is, in one sense, an element in hermeneutics. That is because here we are after the general principles for understanding customary conversations. It is precisely what Ricoeur introduced as Schliermacher's major step: to change the occasional interpretive issues to some general speech and technique.¹² Thus we could remove the curtain of time and perceive the meaning as if at the time of initiating the verse and Traditions.

Sometimes, to understand the intended meaning at the time of initiation, it is necessary to examine the history and discover the signs and phenomena relevant to the meaning of the text. This issue becomes clear especially in some Traditions of Shiite Imams which reflect opponent movement or particular beliefs of some Islamic sects or the commandments current among them. In some Traditions overlooking

content and mere attention to verbal meaning would not take us to the intention of Imam Ali (A.S). In such cases, those who are familiar not only with the Traditions and skills of personal systematic reasoning and deduction of religious laws but also with the political, social and cultural history of Islam and have a perfect knowledge of the unseen and the unsaid about it, have a better chance to infer the intention of Imam Ali (A.S) and to reach a correct interpretation of his Traditions.

Ayatollah Boroujerdi, a renowned Shiite jurist who lived about five decades ago and who instructed Allameh Tabatabai, had his own idea about understanding Traditions. He asserts that one has to know the well-known and popular *fatwas* at the time of the Imams, realize all juristic problems of the era, understand the ideas spread therein and the way the Imams reacted to them.

Ayatollah Boroujerdi adds, "We could not have a tradition at the summit of a mountain and judge it from the foot of the mountain or the valley; we should first climb the mountain to reach the tradition where we could possibly judge it."¹³ Therefore, the viewpoints of Shiite interpreters are greatly similar to the view introduced by August Boeckh about "historical signs" expressed earlier.

8.2.2. Author-Oriented Theory

The author-oriented interpreter looks for the author's intention. So he is always after evidence to help him achieve this goal. According to Shiite interpreters, a faithful person attempts to find an understanding which corresponds to what the jurist has said in order to accomplish his action according to his will. What counts in legal texts is command and prohibition; there is demand in the former and prevention in the latter. Therefore, if there is a command by God, the audience will try to understand whether the command is or is not an obligatory one. And what is his true intention of prohibition? These, in a sense, are extensively discussed in the Shiite Science of Fundamentals of *fiqh*¹⁴

Obviously, there is the issue of happiness and misery as well as guidance and leading astray defined by religion and thus there will be subsequent reward and retribution in the hereafter. This matter makes the religious person "worried" about "correct understanding in accordance with the divine law". Thus he believes in the existence of criteria and principles for the evaluation of accurate and inaccurate interpretation

and thus distinguishing between correct and incorrect understanding and therefore he is within the framework of realist understanding and epistemology.

So interpretation of religious texts is "author-oriented". That is, its main purpose is to understand the author's clear intention. On the other hand, interpretation of religious texts is "text-oriented" too. In other words, he tries to reach the author's intention through the text. The point of departure for interpretation of religious texts is to examine the text and its linguistic structure, which is supposed to take the interpreter to the intention of the author. Therefore, interpretation of the text is neither too "text-oriented" to overlook the author nor is it too "author-oriented" to focus directly on the intellectual, cultural and social geography of the author and take these matters as the departing point for interpretation.¹⁵

8.2.3. Reasons to Verify the Author-oriented Attitude

- A. First of all, we need to know what we mean by "understanding the text". According to Allameh Tabatabai and all other interpreters of the Qur'an, the objective behind understanding texts, especially the religious ones, is to find out the author's intention. That's why one is required to pay attention to pieces of textual evidence as well as linguistic rules and the like to get the author's or the speaker's intention. This way, he will be better off approaching the speaker's intention.
- B. The belief in the interpreter-oriented attitude requires various and sometimes contradictory interpretations. Then one should admit that there are various, sometimes contradictory and numberless meanings which is unreasonable. Thus it is not right to have various or contradictory readings of a single text. Not all texts permit an infinite number of meanings. Therefore, one should distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate understanding by using the logic of understanding religion. Obviously, this matter becomes more delicate as regards Islamic texts, which are rooted in the Qur'an.
- C. According to Gadamer and the advocates of philosophical hermeneutics, in general, it is as if there is no principle or criterion beyond interpretation to act as the standard for different interpretations. Omitting the truth beyond the text, the only thing which will remain is the interpretation which necessarily changes from one interpreter to another, from one language to another and from one

social-historical milieu to another. That is because the changes take place in different horizons and viewpoints being the only genuine truth. In other words, interpretation in this sense is the creation of sense – and not understanding the intention and the principle of the speech. Thus the text or the means that make the text meaningful become independent of the author. In other words, when a text is created it becomes autonomous and independent of the author's intentions and aims. Then even the author could not have a claim over the text or its meaning. In this respect, scholars like Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault speak of "the death of the author". This term is an expression which means the text leads an independent life of its own after it has been written by the author. Needless to say, when one talks about "the death of the author" and an independent existence of the text, interpretation of the text, essentially and basically, will not be the hidden meaning of the text but its expression. Since the text has gained independence from the author, it changes to a silent entity, which might be uttered by any speaker. However, common sense tells us that when reading a text we look for the meaning intended by the author. When one listens to a lecture or reads a text he or she does not try to fathom out what we already understand. All efforts are made to understand what is expected to be communicated by the text. Moreover, the aim of reading a text and even a literary text is to reach the meaning intended by the author of the text, not comprehending or granting any meaning to it. Basically, questioning whether about worldly issues or a single written or spoken text will be essentially regarded as truth- seeking. The purpose of questioning is usually to achieve a correct answer which is "truth", as far as it concerns the external world and "the author's intended meaning" on the part of a single text. As one faces special epistemological questions and needs, one does not introduce them haphazardly and does not find answers to them anywhere by chance. It is the questions which drive us into reading a text, listen to a speech or research in a certain experimental field. When the questions are meaningful one should neither do so nor accept any answer as true. If one attributes whatever meaning to whatever text then why should one read a particular or any text at all?

Then if questioning is a matter connected to the human desire to know and understand, questioning about the text will be questioning about the meaning intended by the author; otherwise it would be meaningless.¹⁶

8.2.4. Interpreter-Oriented Attitude and its Negative Reflection in Religious Thought

The belief in the limitless and unconditional role of the interpreter in understanding a religious text and the possibility of various and suspended reading of the texts threaten the essence of religiosity in different ways. If religious knowledge, that is knowing beliefs, ethics and commands in a broad sense, is the product of religious understanding, and if one accepts that the interpreter's mentality and semantic horizon is the pivot of understanding religious text and that the knowledge obtained through textual understanding is relative and fluid, then how could one take it as the basis for religious faith and belief? Additionally, the reader-oriented theory does not attribute interpretation to the text or its author, but everything is ascribed to the interpreter's mentality and interpretation. Then it becomes a sort of imposition of personal ideas and showing of partial views according to the mental atmosphere created by the conditions of time and place. Then how and by what criteria can one take this kind of interpretation of understanding of religious texts as the Divine message? It is clear that theoretical and practical commitment to the Divine message constitutes the spirit of religiosity. It is important for a believer in a particular religion to know about his religion: what are the commands and how to know God through his message? What does God expect from him? How has he shown eternal life for him? How and to what extent is one supposed to follow His instructions? In fact, he attempts to find genuine answers to the questions which shape his life in the world and the hereafter and influence his future by consulting religious texts. A faithful person tries to decrease the distance between him and God; he wants to step in the right path (*Serat-e Mostaqim*) to approach God. Therefore, the faithful person does not expect to have some illusions. This contradicts the main goal of consulting religious texts.

To accept interpreter-oriented criticism is to credit the fluidity and relativity of religious knowledge which blocks the way to whatever is a fixed belief in religious thinking. No more could one state what Islam or a particular religion says but what a

particular Muslim or religious scholar says. Then one could not talk about some fixed beliefs and their attribution to religion. In short, religion would have a colorless, shapeless, and wax content which changes with every reading and combines with every semantic meaning of the interpreter.

8.2.5. The Secret to Disagreement on Understanding the Text

All perspectives that consider the role of interpreter as important with no role for the author in understanding the text, take it as natural and essential to experience various readings. Here it is significant to explain the secret to the difference in criticisms and the causes involved. This will be carried out through the theory of Shiite interpreters led by Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, who is of "author-oriented" attitude and takes the interpreter's efforts with the aim of perceiving the author's message and intention as something essential. However, there are many cases where there is no point of difference in understanding such texts as divine decrees which have no defect in respect of both document as well as signification. That is whoever consults them within the framework of the rules governing the methodology of understanding the text will reach the same understanding of the text.

Now the causes of reaching different understandings according to the traditional method of textual understanding might be summarized as follows.

8.2.5.1. Different viewpoints on textology

One could find many examples for religious knowledge and understanding religious texts. In Jurisprudence or Theology to distinguish between valid and invalid narrations is greatly significant since invalid narrations are filtered in the field of religious text and play no role in shaping religious knowledge. Distinguishing between valid and invalid narration is connected to studying the sources. There is a difference of views in some issues of these sciences though not directly related to interpretation and textual understanding. They are not regarded as a basis for understanding the text but are helpful in drawing a distinction between religious and non-religious texts. Therefore, some narration might be regarded as belonging to this corpus by other law experts. Thus there would be a difference of opinion in terms of jurisprudential knowledge which results in a difference in understanding.

8.2.5.2. Disagreement on the extent and Way of Interrogating the Text

A text could not only be outspoken in communicating meanings and themes but also capable of interrogating. Questions related to the text could be introduced and one could deduce answers to them from the text. For instance, Qur'anic verses say nothing about Socialism but it is possible that an interpreter of the Qur'an might evaluate the relationship between Socialism and the Qur'an and say whether the spirit of Qur'anic teachings on what pertains to the economy agree or disagree with socialism.

Interpretations of a text sometimes do not collide in verbal meaning and the difference among interpretations goes back to the extent and way of interrogation. A number of different of interpretations does not necessarily mean a difference in the verbal meaning of the text; some of the differences are the result of interrogation. A theologically inclined interpreter is more interested in interrogating the Qur'an about theological topics, while an interpreter with mystical inclinations pays more attention to such relevant questions.

8.2.5.3. Diversity of Opinion in the Language of Text

One's attitude to the language of a text is really important in interpreting it. Is the language a customary and natural one or is it a language of innuendo, symbol and reference? Is the language of a report an allegorical and figurative one or is it a narrative and factual one? These differences will directly affect our reading and understanding. In many cases mystical interpretations of the Qur'an are based on decoding and searching for the hidden meanings which are beyond the apparent meaning of the verses; nevertheless, other interpretations do not bear such an impression of the language of the Qur'an. It is even likely that an interpreter generally recognizes the language of the text as customary and conversational but in one case he might bring evidence to prove that the language is allegorical. For example, he recognizes the verses on the story of creation as allegorical. These fundamental differences might be effective in the language of the text, method of interpretation and comprehension of the text.

8.2.5.4. Interference of External Knowledge in Textual Understanding

As noted earlier, external knowledge certainly becomes effective in understanding the clear intention of the text. However, this basis is not accepted by some interpreters. For example, exoterists and traditionalists believe in the separation of the field of intellectual teachings and understanding religious texts. They also insist on preserving the form of the *hadith* which leads to differences in understanding religious texts. Some interpreters believe in using the Traditions for interpreting Qur'anic verses and their interpretations are compiled accordingly. In such Qur'anic interpretations, there have been attempts to interpret the topics of Qur'anic verses on the basis of the tenors of the Traditions.

While some interpreters do not accept such a basis and believe in the semantic independence of Qur'anic verses, it is natural to find effective such differences in view about the way and extent of interference of external knowledge on textual understanding.

8.2.5.5. The Dispute over Interpretation of Text by Text

Differences of opinion regarding the way of interpreting the text naturally causes differences in textual understanding. As an instance, Allameh Tabatabai states that Qur'anic verses interpret one another and that it is possible to interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an, as we have seen. He argues that Qur'anic verses are referred to each other and that this method, derived from the interpretive method of Ahl al-Bayt, is the best for Qur'anic interpretation.¹⁷ He adopts a method different from most others used by other critics who attempt to interpret the Qur'an in the light of literary devices or by means of the Traditions.

8.2.5.6. Focus on Context of Discourse

In understanding the text sometimes the reader does not pay attention to some verbal and non-verbal contexts, while focusing on other contexts not achieved by others. There seem to be various matters involved in reading the Qur'anic text, such as knowing the verbal meaning of the words. Contextual signs obtained from the verses, Traditions or historical conditions of the time of the text each could play a very important role in reading and understanding the text of the verses or Traditions. This is a point of difference among Shiite scholars. For example, some of them

recommend attention to the form of Qur'anic verses; others reject such indulgence.¹⁸ Some scholars think it permissible to restrict meanings of Qur'anic verses using the Traditions while other Shiite scholars forbid it. Knowledge about the history and conditions of discourse is regarded as important by some scholars in order to grasp the author's intention while overlooked by others. Allameh Sayyed Ja'far Mortaza Ameli, a great Shiite scholar, asserts in this regard: "Do not fail to notice the role of knowledge about historical conditions and religious texts. All traditions are formed in their historical context. One has a reciprocal relation of impressing and being impressed. Therefore, appropriate understandings of many texts require a perfect knowledge of time, place and other conditions of the text. Such knowledge helps to understand the restrictions, references and delicacies."¹⁹

For example, keeping in mind the conditions during the time of Imam Baqir (A.S) and Imam Sadiq (A.S) (the fifth and sixth Shiite Imams) is a very significant context in interpreting their Traditions which say, "*Ijtihad* and reason are forbidden." If one is familiar with the cultural and social conditions of their age, he or she will realize that what they meant by *ijtihad* and reason is not the common signification. What they meant by *ijtihad* then is what stands against the Divine decree or text expressed in the Qur'an or *Sunnah*. At the time, some treated *ijtihad* as parallel to the Book and *Sunnah* and regarded it as a source of their *fatwas*, while reason meant personal speculation. Obviously, the difference in the point of view of scholars in this respect would cause various understandings, as a group of the advocates of "traditionalism" made *ijtihad* and reasoning forbidden with reference to this type of Traditions. They also announced invalid the signification of reasoning of religious precepts. They rejected reasoning as a valid source for the evaluation of religious precepts. Nevertheless, there is an outstanding difference between *ijtihad* and reason in those traditions and *ijtihad* and reason are now in vogue among scholars of the Science of Principles and interpretation of the Qur'an.²⁰

8.2.5.7. Taking Personal Manifestation for Objective Manifestation

What counts towards a clear understanding of the text is an objective manifestation of discourse, which implies what the speaker has intended. This is usually crystallized through customary and linguistic discourse. Customary manifestation paves the way for objective manifestation. However, the interpreter sometimes

assumes that what has been formed in his mind is precisely the customary and objective manifestation of the discourse. Nevertheless, due to some cultural liaisons and special personal interests, what is formed in his mind (personal manifestations) is different from the customary and linguistic understanding of the text. This matter causes differences in understanding.²¹ What is important in understanding the text is the typical customary manifestation of the discourse, which is created by the customary knowledge of the audience not by any particular person. No audience could perceive the author's discourse as it is manifested in his mind. On the contrary, he should look for the typical customary manifestation which has to be employed for understanding what the speaker says. This is a corollary of the fact that language is social.

8.3. Prejudgment and the Influence on the Process of Understanding

Martin Heidegger seriously opposed the dominant theory of the Age of Enlightenment when he introduced the issue of *fore structure* for having understanding and interpretation. He postulated that every understanding and interpretation is of a triad structure and that there would be no interpretation without presupposition: One contextualizes a matter when he faces it. Context validation is the result of *facticity*. This is the first layer of understanding or "fore-having". After contextualization, one looks from a certain viewpoint recognized as the second layer of the triad structure of understanding and named *fore-sight* by Heidegger. Finally, one understands it in a certain way called *fore-conception* by Heidegger.²²

Like Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann introduces the concept of pre-understanding and emphasizes its role in understanding and interpretation. Following these two critics, Gadamer introduces the problem of pre-judgment and attributes a key role to it. Thus he believes: "Doubtless, there is no understanding without pre-judgment."²³

Gadamer is a follower of Heidegger in respect of the hermeneutic circle and the circular nature of understanding. This shows the significance of pre-judgment since distinguishing between the two and the hermeneutic circle is different from the concept of circular understanding assumed by Schliermacher and Dilthey. According to Gadamer and Heidegger understanding begins with the interpreter. The interpreter

opens the door of understanding and suggests some meaning connected to the subject matter. That is, understanding begins at the interpreter's pre-judgment and pre-understanding.

According to Gadamer, pre-judgments play the positive role in the understanding process and the hermeneutic experience. In other words, this is the only way towards understanding and interpreting the material, with one's pre-judgments and presuppositions always there to interfere.²⁴

Van.A.Harvey says with regard to Gadamer that he argues, following Heidegger, that interpretation also assumes a context of intelligibility, and that the presuppositions and assumptions –one might say prejudices- of the interpreter are precisely what enable understanding as well as misunderstanding. Consequently, our own assumptions and beliefs are not necessarily barriers to understanding but preconditions of it. The quest for a presuppositionless understanding is futile. Every text or object is interpreted from some standpoint in a tradition that constitutes the horizon within which anything becomes intelligible. This horizon is continually modified as it encounters objects, but there is no final and objective interpretation.²⁵

One should realize that Gadamer does not believe in the possibility of refining pre-judgments and separating accurate from inaccurate pre-judgments by the interpreter because such pre-judgments and pre-understanding which occupy the interpreter's mind are not under his control. He could not possibly separate the productive pre-judgments which make understanding possible from those that obstruct it and cause misunderstanding. Such a separation, however, is formed through the understanding process.²⁶ Here is a brief study of Gadamer's thoughts together with Shiite interpretation:

8.3.1. Absence of Content Interference of Pre-judgments in Understanding

As mentioned earlier, pre-judgments are always there with the interpreter, not at the disposal of the interpreter ,who cannot escape from them. The interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, according to Allameh Tabatabai, is a special case with particular conditions. The interference of the interpreter's qualities and intellectual characteristics might lead to personal judgments. In fact, reading the Qur'an through

specific pre-judgments would be a sort of imposing one's ideas on the Holy Qur'an. Thus Sufist, referential or symbolic interpretations or interpreting the Qur'an against the background of experimental presuppositions are regarded as instances of personal interpretations, by Tabatabai.²⁷

To understand a text, of course, there is a need for some primary pre-understanding. Basically, an interpreter has always some knowledge of the subject matter but that basic knowledge plays no key role in the organization of understanding and interpretation. It does not represent the internal meaning. What the Shiite interpreters denounce is Gadamer's emphasis on the role of pre-judgment in shaping the content. He states that understanding is the result of combining the interpreter's pre-judgments with the semantic horizon of the work; this claim has not been substantiated.

8.3.2. The Closing of the Door on Criticism of Interpretation

In case of Gadamer's statement, criticism of interpretations ought to stop. Every one interprets texts and works of art according to what extent they are subject to cultural heritage, expectations, presuppositions and questions. They are all the same and even an accurate interpretation is meaningless to Gadamer. However, many criticisms of various interpretations are obviously noticed. Some criticism deal with methods and some with understanding itself. The criticism also covers traditions, cultural events, expectations and presuppositions. The only expectations are the self-evident truths or the theoretical insights which lead to evident knowledge.²⁸

As presuppositions and expectations, according to Gadamer, affect the understanding of interpreters, he does not introduce any criteria to stand against arbitrary interpretations. In other words, there are no objective criteria in Gadamer's theory; mere attention to the structure or understanding or the possibility of understanding is not enough for the interpreters. The validity and correct understanding is also significant.

8.3.3. Contradiction in Gadamer

Gadamer asserts that genuine pre-judgments produce the act of understanding while incorrect judgments cause misunderstanding.²⁹ This distinction is highly problematic

for Gadamer. The reason is that once he decides to introduce some signs or guidelines between the two pre-judgments by means of some specific criteria or methods, it would all contradict his criticism about interpretation. In various instances, he criticizes the attitude of the age of interpretation to the relationship between truth and method. He also denounces the idea that one could distinguish the true from the untrue. Then how could he find a method for distinguishing between the two pre-judgments and thus introduce an unbending principle?

On the other hand, absence of criterion implies surrender to absolute relativism: every understanding, though resulting from illusionary and invalid pre-judgments, would enjoy the same level as other understandings and interpretations. Therefore, there is absolutely no criterion for distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate (invalid) understanding, and all types of pre-judgments should be viewed the same way.³⁰

8.3.4. The Author's Interests and Expectations from a Text

Philosophical hermeneutics believes in the author's interests and expectations. The question is how should one know about the author's interests and expectations. When there is no principle involved, everyone will invent for the author some interest and expectation based on his own interest and expectation. It is there that "the signification of discourse" gets lost in the middle of expectations and interests. Nevertheless, "the customary signification of discourse" becomes the key to the discovery of the author's intentions and interests. When everyone interprets an author and his work according to his own interests and inclinations, interpretations will be various and sometimes contradictory - though based on what Heidegger and Gadamer say all interpretations would be correct! Every interpreter is entitled to his own interests and expectations (whether right or wrong); he has the right to express them, not omit or modify them. Then there should be as many interpretations as there are interpreters. The interpretations all follow the personal inclinations and assumptions of the interpreters. None of them should be invalid. On the other hand, the reader should one way or the other reach full relativism and insightful scepticism at the end.

Interpreters of the Qur'an admit that the author's interests and expectations control the discourse and when there is a need for interpretation they should be ruled by the same interests and expectations. Otherwise, there will be an interpretation irrelevant to the text. But when the interpreter's interests and expectations are made to rule the text and its interpretation, the result would be nothing but diversion from an accurate "interpretation". This definitely would not be a discovery of the meaning of the discourse.³¹

According to interpreters particularly Allameh Tabatabai, the correct method is that the interpreter takes the context and the form of the text into account and with the help of self-evident truths attempts to discover the intent of the author. If this is not granted then everyone will have his own interpretation.

Texts usually reflect the author's expectations through form and context and critics would not be disappointed. Interests and expectations of individuals or (ethnic) groups should not be followed in the interpretation of the Qur'an. It is always easy to realize what Islam has expected from people. There are abundant contexts and formal references and one should not hesitate to utilise them. Therefore, based on this self-evident pre-understanding of the Qur'an one can interpret it. In interpreting difficult verses one highlights this same pre-understanding without violating the mechanism of verbal "signification" making use of the verses and the occasion of the revelation. One also consults the ideas of different interpreters trying to understand the verses and reach common deductions to dwarf the difference of opinion. It is interesting that there have been no differences about the expectations of the messenger of revelation among interpreters of the Qur'an. All agree on the principles and important matters. All believe that the Qur'an is a book with ideological, ethical and practical aspects. The one God and the Hereafter have a central position while ethical issues, virtues and good deeds are there to systematize life in this world and the hereafter to facilitate the state of spiritual servitude to God. In the interpretation of the Qur'an, therefore, one should expect to find the same centrality and principles. When interpreting it, one should find all parts and components matched with the principles. When the standard is the people's expectations there will be a state of confusion in interpreting either the Qur'an or any divine or human text. However, when the standard is the intention of the messenger of the Qur'an there will be a unity and

coherence in its interpretation. Thus there is a series of general principles and presuppositions for the interpretation of Qur'anic verses which have almost been accepted by most of its interpreters, including Allameh Tabatabai. These principles are to be observed in the process of interpreting the Qur'an.

8.3.5. General Principles and Presuppositions of Understanding for Qur'anic Interpretation

- Meaning as well as form and words of the Qur'an are revelation. Some verses are explicit in saying that the Arabic words and language are themselves revelation. Examples include, "Thus have We sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Qur'an (و كذلك اوحينا اليك قرانا عربيا)"³² and "This is Arabic, pure and clear (هذا لسان عربي مبين)" (16:103). To prove this meaning that it is the word of God and not man, some verses have challenged anyone to write such a text. They allude to the fact that it is a veritable miracle and beyond human capacity.³³
- The audience for the Qur'an is a thoughtful mankind. Reason plays a key role in understanding the text. Likewise, the Qur'an has chosen to speak to the people with the same reasoning. Then religious and intellectual knowledge match.
- Religious precepts are eternal and not limited to a specific place. The Holy Qur'an does not belong to a particular nation such as the Arabs, or a particular group such as Muslims. On the contrary, it deals with other groups like those of the Book, Jews and Christians. It invites all to truthfulness.³⁴
- Verbal meaning is preceded by theories since understanding the language of an era depends on understanding the scientific and philosophical theories of that era. Thus the fixity of form (words, etc.) does not guarantee fixity of meaning. It is wrong to assume that one could understand the form by a blank mind. As minds are filled with data and themes, with the passage of time they will find fresh meanings in the religious texts they read.³⁵
- The Qur'an does not follow a particular language: it uses the language of the people. Allameh Tabatabai makes the following statement in this regard: "Like other common discourses, the Holy Qur'an bespeaks its intent; it is never vague in its signification. Whoever knows Arabic will comprehend

Qur'anic verses clearly like he comprehends any other discourse in Arabic. Moreover, there are many verses in the Qur'an that address a particular group like the Israelites, the Believers, the Unbelievers and sometimes the general public and inspire them by their intents, raise some arguments, challenge them to bring them up, like the Qur'an does, if they doubt the fact that it is a revelation by God. Needless to say, it would be meaningless to speak to people by means of some linguistic form which is not capable of communicating meaning. Neither is it acceptable to ask people to bring something similar to some incomprehensible material.³⁶

Therefore, interpretation of the Qur'an corresponds to the general regulations of interpreting texts. That is contrary to the ideas expressed by those who regard the language of the Qur'an as a special language and who say that the Qur'an speaks to certain people who possess the key to its understanding.

8.3.6. Expectations of the Interpreter

What is meant by expectations of the interpreter? One ought to know that religion is for mankind and not the other way round. One is supposed to identify his expectation through religion. How does man need religion? How unique is it in providing for some particular human needs? In the form of a heavenly book it contains guidelines for humanity at the same level of understanding. Had it been revealed to the Jinn or angels, its expression and content might have been different as God is All-Wise and All-Merciful He has been conscious of saying something logical to be taken and digested by human beings. What the interpreter expects from the text is inevitably not different from the speaker's intents. The audience of the Qur'an is not void of knowledge, reason, feeling, emotion, desire and expectation. So such an interpreter is called for while the interpreter's expectations actually reflect the expectations of the speaker of the text. The interpreter searches for the speaker's expectations in the context of his own inclinations. One could not say that there is no relationship between the expectations of the speaker and those of the interpreter of the text.³⁷

8.3.7. The Role of the Semantic Horizon of the Interpreter in Understanding the Text

The correct method of understanding the text dictates that although the interpreter has his own specific semantic horizon and intellectual perspectives, the aim of interpreting the text is to reach the semantic horizon of the author. The mentality of the interpreter obliterates the achievement of such an aim. The interpreter should look for the author's mentality, intentions and the ideas hidden behind the form. He should not combine his own mentality with that of the author and make his own mentality in control. If one realizes that the understanding of the interpreter exists on his own semantic horizon and perspective, he will recognize the role of the interpreter in the process of understanding. The fact that the text is the outcome of the author's mind and that he has written the sentences to reflect his semantic horizon, is a signal which indicates the pivotal role of the author's mentality and semantic horizon. Of course, it should be admitted that no reader approaches a text with a blank mind. On the contrary, every interpreter has expectations, pre-judgments and pre-understanding and approaches a text with a background of interests or his own taste. Thus, unconsciously, his mental form affects his understanding of the text. Therefore, understanding and interpreting the text is not independent of the interpreter's pre-understanding.

There is a problem to be solved by analyzing and explaining the way pre-understanding interferes with understanding. The fact is that the interpreter faces the text with some data and knowledge in mind. Such background knowledge helps to achieve understanding and is never harmful to the process of comprehension. It is only when the pre-understanding attempts to play a role in the content of the message and impose itself on meaning that it becomes unwanted and invalid. In other words, once the interference of the pre-understanding results in "subjective interpretation", it would be undesirable and invalid. Otherwise, the interference would be innocent. Further explanation requires categorization of the pre-understanding relevant to the process of textual understanding. Shiite interpreters admit some of the categories in textual understanding while they consider other categories as unacceptable and causing misunderstanding. Here are some of the categories:

1. A type of knowledge which interferes with textual understanding as a primary and instrumental role. Such cases include familiarity with literary rules, logic, vocabulary, rules of conversation as well as reasonable understanding in dialogues which belong to earlier sciences that play no role in shaping the content of the message and impose no meaning on the text. However, it is impossible to understand the text without knowing them.
2. A type of knowledge which paves the ground for raising questions about the text or, in other words, makes it possible to "interrogate the text.." Every text directly expresses matters which compose its direct and apparent themes. At the same time, it is possible to clarify the relationship between the meanings of the text with other issues through raising some questions which help reach answers to the questions. This is called "interrogating the text", whose primary tool is to raise suitable questions about the text. Quantity and quality of the questions depend on the interpreter's mind and the semantic horizon. One ought to realize that questions only pave the ground for deduction of the meaning of the text. It does not enjoy interference in respect of content to illustrate the meaning of the text.³⁸
3. The reader's and interpreter's information and background about the character of the author helps towards an understanding of his intention. For instance, one's knowledge about Hafiz (a renowned Iranian poet) treading the path of mysticism prepares the ground for a mystical interpretation of his *ghazals*.
4. Sometimes the interpreter's pre-understanding partly interferes in the perception of the speaker's intention. To explain this point, something has to be mentioned: the verbal signification of the text, termed "the manifestation of discourse", is subordinate to the form of the text and the verbal signification of discourse. However, the speaker's serious intention is sometimes different from the verbal signification of the discourse. The context sometimes helps us understand that the true meaning of the speech is different from its verbal manifestation. The definite pre-understanding of the reader sometimes plays the role in such contexts. In some cases the manifestation of discourse becomes certain for the interpreter but because of the incompatibility of this manifestation with the certain and indisputable intellectual content, he could not take this apparent meaning as the serious intent of the speaker. Inevitably, the interpreter ought to comprehend the

serious intention of the discourse as proportional to the certain knowledge and thus overlook the verbal manifestation because of the pre-knowledge. For example, the interpreter, noting the intellectual demonstrations, is certain that God is not a material being. Then one encounters the Qur'anic verse, "يد الله فوق" ³⁹ (The hand of God is over their hands)" where the verbal manifestation of the verse bespeaks of the attribution of hand to God. Since the interpreter enjoys that certain knowledge, he does not recognize the apparent meaning of the verse as the serious intention of God. He interprets the word "يد (hand)" as a metaphor for power and divine help. Of course, one ought to take care that the license to use the context to understand the speaker's serious intention belongs merely to certain and definite knowledge: one could never give up the verbal manifestation of the verse or tradition because of some knowledge obtained through surmises and guesses.

5. The fifth type of pre-knowledge refers to a type of knowledge that is uncertain and affects the decision on the determination of the verbal appearance of discourse or the speaker's serious intention consciously or unconsciously. This interference is unacceptable and is termed "subjective interpretation" in Islamic texts.⁴⁰ Textual interpretation has always been infected by subjective interpretation. The traditional theory of interpretation has continuously insisted on preventing such a transference. However, modern theories of interpretation in hermeneutics and literary criticism not only allow subjective interpretation but they also consider it essential. They assert that interpretation of the text essentially belongs to the category of subjective interpretation. It is impossible, they continue, to interpret a text without applying the interpreter's ideas to it.

The interpreter, according to Allameh Tabatabai, has no right to make his personal ideas interfere with the interpretation or make a comparative study of the verses on the basis of his ideology or taste. As the rules on the extraction of the meaning of verses regard diction and the limit of signification, it is also recommended that the combination of sentences and conditions of diction be observed while at the same time context and the customary methods of understanding the intention ought to be kept in mind. Thus the interpreter has to follow the verbal signification of the verses not to make the signification of the

verses follow his own understanding of them. He is not allowed to go after motivations, which lead to inappropriate comparison and interpretation. To observe such a rule, the interpreter needs not only to prevent the interference of religion differences and conflicts, intellectual and traditional sediments as well as personal and scientific ideas in the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, but also to have sufficient practice in extracting and discovering similar meanings and intentions from Arabic. He ought to possess organized intellectual information as well as common sense and taste.⁴¹

It becomes clear from the above mentioned classification that it is an acknowledged truth that "the interpreter's mentality" plays a role in the process of understanding. However, Tabatabai rejects the assumption that the effect and the role is interfering in the content or subjective interpretation in nature. The interpreter's knowledge should be used for comprehension of the message of the text as well as the semantic horizon and the intentions of the author, as witnessed in the first type. On the other hand, if the interpreter's pre-understanding is of the fifth type, it will trample on the act of understanding and thus should be avoided.

8.3.8. Interpretation not application

Gadamer and Philosophical hermeneutics in general are mixed up as far as "interpretation" and "comprehension" are concerned. While the interpreter has to look for interpretation through pre-understanding, expectations and historical evidence, he is actually not after interpretation but comprehension. There is a difference between the question, "What does the text say?" and the one which asks, "What should one compare the text to?" If the text is somehow outspoken it will be clear what it says; if it is not, then one ought to make it speak. But how and by what criteria should one do so? It is to be interpreted by means of other texts and its appearance, or according to the theory of Allameh Tabatabai, through the strategy of interpreting a text by that text, that is by its other parts. Here is where correct interpretation exists. Thus parts of the Qur'an can be interpreted by means of other Qur'anic verses as well as the Traditions of the Prophet(s) and Shiite Imams who have interpreted the verses, aided by intellectual precepts and principles and in accordance with the coherent set of original Islamic culture. There might appear to be some differences due to the nature of the work which is jurisprudential and

deductive. Nevertheless, agreements outweigh the differences, which very often could be settled.⁴²

Therefore, the acceptance of the fundamentals and principles of philosophical hermeneutics leads to "comparison" which goes beyond the sphere of interpretation. It is something immensely detested by Allameh Tabatabai who warns against it: when one is searching for the meaning of a Qur'anic verse, it will create a big difference whether he asks, "what does the Qur'an say?" or "what should we base the verse on?" The first question will make the interpreter temporarily forget about every theoretical matter; while the second makes the interpreter bring forth his ideas and start an argument. It is clear that such an argument would not focus on the meaning of the discourse.⁴³

8.3.9. A Distinction between Justified and Unjustified Presupposition

Needless to say, reading or understanding a text depends on a number of preliminary tools such as decoding the words and identifying the historical era of the author and the text as well as linguistic regulations which enjoy an instrumental role in the understanding of the text and support the reader in grasping the text and the author's intention. Without such instruments even reading a clear text becomes impossible. Such pre-knowledge of the interpreter is something necessary in interpretation. One never doubts its validity and role. One of the introductions is to know the author and his moral-ideological stances as well as his scientific level, which could be interpreted as "the world of the author". If the text is ambiguous, the reader and interpreter discover or at least approach the intention of the author through entering his world. For example, in poems where the poet speaks of wine and drinking, one could interpret his poems through understanding his disposition and ethics. Such a method of using both hermeneutic functions and interpreter is completely valid. However, sometimes the interpreter and the reader, despite other contexts and evidence (for instance, the world of the author and its evident principles), interpret the text independently. In fact, in interpretation, he relies mostly on his own taste and pre-suppositions rather than the text and the author's world. Actually, he does not read the text; on the contrary, he injects meaning into it. Sometimes a reader does not pay attention to other evidence, takes "wine" literally in a poem while another reader might consider its figurative meaning. An outstanding instance is the interference of

unjustifiable and invalid pre-supposition in textual interpretation, which is termed *interpretationalism* by interpreters of the Qur'an, and is forbidden.⁴⁴

8.4. Interpretation and the Logic of Questioning and Answering

The dialogue between the text's semantic horizon and that of the interpreter means a bond and a mixture of the two, that is the horizon at the time of writing and that at the time of reading or interpreting the text. It is inevitable to mix the two horizons at the time of interpretation. The horizon of today is not fixed or static; but it is a changing and evolving horizon.⁴⁵ Gadamer believes in the mutual interference of the interpreter and the work itself in organizing a product called "understanding" and "interpretation". He presents this view in the term *fusion of horizons*. That is, understanding is the result of fusing the semantic horizon of the interpreter with that of the work. This process also follows the logic of questioning and answering. The corollary of such interpretation of understanding is that every interpretation is inevitably imperfect.⁴⁶

He thinks that questioning starts from the interpreter who is influenced by his pre-judgments and semantic horizon. Questions and answers should be designed in a way to allow the text to speak. Understanding a work is conditioned by a dialogue and a discussion. In the dialogue the interpreter ought to expose himself to the work to allow it maximum space to speak. It is essential, of course, that this take place in the interpreter's hermeneutic environment so that it takes on something of the interpreter's mentality. Therefore, the actual understanding is the result of fusing the two horizons and the product of the unpredictable dialogue of the interpreter and the work.⁴⁷

Gadamer postulates that the basic element in interpretation is in "the position of dialogue". He asserts that one could realize the correct understanding of a text only when aware of the questions to be answered by that text.⁴⁸ Thus he elaborates that understanding and recognition are always associated with the fusing the two different semantic horizons of author and interpreter. The horizons appear to be independent of each other.⁴⁹ Gadamer put the logic of dialogue in the center and thus proved that no question in the past text could be understood in the form of abstract and monologic terms. Therefore, the questions and answers of today should be combined

so that the hidden meaning becomes uncovered.⁵⁰ When past texts are read and interpreted in this way, first they communicate to-day's meaning. Then the hidden aspects of textual meanings are revealed through the process of dialogue with the semantic horizon of today.

Gadamer believes that dialogue is an effort to extract a true understanding of the text. With the introduction of the principle of dialogue, the theory of intentionality or attention proves worthless and insufficient to him. He is sure that the distance between interpreter and text is not the distance between subject and object since the text has not already entered the interpreter's semantic horizon. When the interpreter is addressed by the text, he takes it as something to be understood and have dialogue with on the topic in hand.

Gadamer underlines it with the following:

Understanding always involves upholding the option that is to be understood against the power of the meaning dispositions that rule the interpreter. This Hermeneutical exertion is required precisely when we are claimed by the subject matter. Without being claimed by the subject matter, one would not be able to understand the tradition at all. What would result is the total indifference to the subject matter by the merely psychological or historical interpretation that enters there where one actually no longer understands.⁵¹

The fact is that Gadamer does not attempt to found a system of exegesis rules. What he has in mind is to explicate the conditions for the possibility of general understanding. Such conditions, he claims, would reduce the value of the idea of intention, attention and mentality. He believes that the methodological approaches of understanding in human and natural manifestations are rooted in history. Then our understanding stems from pre-understandings and pre-suppositions. It is a method by which understanding is achieved. It is conditioned by and limited to the past, or to use Gadamer's term "the historical work".⁵² For him two elements are of key importance as mentioned in *Truth and Method*: first is the explanation of the idea of presupposition and the influence of the past and tradition in understanding; second is clarifying the theory of the concept of dialogue. Gadamer explicitly states that "understanding" takes place merely through "understanding with the other". When

confronting a text, different ideas and viewpoints as well as various living experiences confront each other and provide the grounds for dialogue. One could give one's own presuppositions a role to play and thus boost the validity of one's own viewpoint through the process of dialogue.⁵³

This type of interpretation of understanding and the belief in the permanent development of the horizon within the tradition leads to the result that every interpretation is necessarily incomplete. That is because, historically speaking, it is a conditional matter. The present status postulated here might be criticized in respect of some elements in the near future. Interpretation itself is a temporary matter as it depends on its particular historical conditions as well as some definite interests and motivations. These conditions and interests themselves change and are modified in the process of interpretation.⁵⁴

Understanding tradition and its elements is a sort of dialogue with the subject matter within the tradition. The fusion of horizons ushers the end of this dialogue. It happens when the interpreter understands the subject of interpretation in a different way. This difference exists because of either of the two reasons: the text or work has succeeded in changing his pre-judgment; or his pre-judgments, due to different reasons and the challenge with the opposite viewpoint, have been re-confirmed and have remained.

Gadamer expresses the issue in this way: some change ought to take place customarily in the process of the dialogue between the interpreter and the work. Dialogue does not mean that one has to follow the other; rather both sides are affected by the essence of the subject matter, and they realize that at the end they are different from what they used to be.⁵⁵

In short, Gadamer states that understanding and perception is the result of fusing the interpreter's semantic horizon and that of the text. In other words, the interpreter with his particular pre-knowledge enters a dialectical dialogue with the text. He continues the questions and answers so that he brings about the fusion of the semantic horizon of the text and the interpreter, which results in understanding and perception. Thus with this matter in mind, different interpreters with different semantic horizons approach the text and pay attention to questions and answers in the text to achieve an

understanding. As every interpreter has their own semantic horizon, when they face the text they will have their own particular reading. Since interpreters are limitless there might be numberless readings and understandings. Furthermore, all readings are valid and evident because each reading is achieved through a dialectical dialogue with the text. Then one could not say that a reading is false. In other words, the realization of a reading or understanding is evidence to the validity of that reading or understanding.⁵⁶

Criticism and Survey

Now it is time to examine and criticize Gadamer's theory on "the logic of question and answer" from Allameh Tabatabai's perspective.

The insistence of Gadamer and his followers on this matter that understanding happens with the questioning of the interpreter, and that there would be no understanding without questioning, is an implausible claim. It is true that one function of the interpreter is "to interrogate the text" and confront it with questions; however, it is an unrealistic claim to say that the process of understanding always depends on questioning. The possibility of questioning a text or a work of art is a certain fact; nevertheless, it is not acceptable to say that understanding depends on questioning. We have opened many a letter and realized the meaning before we raise a single question on its content. When one accidentally opens a book or a journal, the relevant meaning does not depend on raising content questions. Text is not a silent world speaking merely through questions: the natural relationship between form and content in a language make the sentences meaningful. Understanding these sentences depends on one's knowledge of the language not the raising of questions. After one understands the meaning of the text, of course, one might raise questions on it.⁵⁷

Some of our presuppositions and knowledge prepare the way for interrogating the text. In other words, the interference in the text is of the interrogating type rather than the semantic and production type. Now the major difference between the interpretation of Allameh Tabatabai (*Al-Mizan*) and other Qur'anic interpretations becomes clear. That is Tabatabai has interrogated the Qur'anic texts more than other interpreters. On the one hand, he was a specialist in philosophy, theology as well as wide cultural and social studies of his day and, on the other hand, his preciseness and

deep personal thinking was certain. He has raised questions about the Qur'an and reached the answers in this regard. One could not find a precedent to this work since the questions were not in vogue. For example, on the economic issues of the Qur'an, Tabatabai introduces the relationship between Islam and Socialism. He asks whether the relevant verses of the Qur'an are pro-Socialism or pro-Capitalism. Does Tabatabai introduce important questions about the individual and society in the context of the social issues of Islam? He has adapted this method of interpretation from Imam Ali (A.S) (the first Shiite Imam) who has said, "Interrogate the Qur'an, raise new questions and expect answers from it."⁵⁸ It is taken for granted that Tabatabai raises new questions about the Qur'an, but he does not provide the answers. He questions but he does not answer his questions. It is the Qur'an that responds to the questions. Thus his interference and mentality in interpretation is an interrogating one which raises questions rather than shapes the answers. Therefore, from Tabatabai's perspective, it is true that the interpreter's mentality briefly interferes in the action of interpretation; however, the interference is not everywhere of content nature and of personal interpretation type. Interference is sometimes instrumental and at other times it functions via questioning and interrogating. Sometimes the interference is in terms of content, but methodical which is right. For instance, our reasoning and certain knowledge sometimes interfere in understanding, as the verse mentioned earlier (يد الله فوق ايديهم)⁵⁹ apparently implies that God has hands and a physical body. With the help of this certain knowledge we conclude that although the verse mentions "يد" (hand), what is meant is not the literal meaning but it is a metaphor for power, attention and help. So sometimes our background knowledge interferes in the terms of content; however, it is a methodical and limited kind of interference. It is limited to certainty. Nevertheless, once uncertain knowledge and pre-judgment intend to interfere in understanding in respect of content, to shape a meaning and impose itself on the text, that will be subjective interpretation which is unacceptable.⁶⁰

8.4.1. Production not Reproduction

According to Romantic Hermeneutics, understanding is the reproduction of the author's mentality. The true meaning of a work depends on the mentality of the author and the early and original audience for which the work was intended.

Therefore, all efforts by the interpreter ought to be spent on the aim of achieving the true meaning and the reproduction of the early mentality. The distance in time between interpreter and work has to be covered and not stop the understanding of the true meaning. On the other hand, Philosophical Hermeneutics recognizes this viewpoint as *Naïve Historicism*. It believes that reproduction of past meaning is essentially impossible, and that understanding has a productive not a reproductive aspect; therefore, distance in time is a fact which interferes in organizing the meaning of the work. There is nothing to overcome this fact, bridge it or overlook its role in organizing its meaning.⁶¹

Hirsch asserts that the major responsibility of the interpreter is the recognition and reproduction of the logic of the author and his world. The criterion for appropriateness and hermeneutics, according to him, is the reconstruction of the author's intention and major thoughts.⁶²

Hirsch also believes that textual understanding is a sort of bond with what the author has written. Understanding is a different form of perception and even living with the conditions prevalent at the time or the background of the text and the author. Every interpreter reproduces in his mind, through the process of understanding, the logic and attitudes, intellectual data and the life process and, simply, the world of the author.⁶³

Thus the meaning of the text and the essential intention should be imagined not only as accessible but also as immutable. The appropriate and objective understanding of the interpreter of the text takes place when meaning itself is considered as fixed. If the meaning of the text is changeable, there will be no criterion to judge true from untrue understanding. Once we accept that meaning changes, there will be no standards to recognize true meaning from among the bulk of understandings.⁶⁴ But scholars of philosophical hermeneutics such as Gadamer do not accept this idea. They have talked about crisis of meaning and fluidity of understanding. They postulate, firstly, that there is no fixed and acceptable meaning in understanding the text and, secondly, in case the immutability of early meaning is granted, there will be no say about the definite and final meaning or a single understanding. These scholars believe that the dialogue with the text is the only strategy for textual understanding. The dialogue between the semantic horizon of the text and the semantic horizon of

the reader or interpreter means the fusion of the two into what is the horizon of the time of composition and the horizon of the time of interpretation or the present time. This fusion is inevitable at the time of interpretation. The horizon of today is not static and fixed; rather it is an open and mutable horizon. Understanding for them is not repeating the past or the horizon of yesterday but it is contributing in meaning as well as the context of today. From what was mentioned about these scholars, one could realize their claim saying there is essentially no definite and appropriate interpretation of the text.⁶⁵

8.4.2. Endlessness of Understanding

As we have seen, followers of the school of Philosophical Hermeneutics including Gadamer believe that the interpreter, supported by his own background, enters into a dialectical dialogue with the text. He continues his question-answer interaction with the text so that a fusion takes place between the semantic horizons of the text and its interpreter. Understanding, perception and reading will be the outcome of this stage⁶⁶.

Accordingly, different interpreters with different semantic horizons encounter the text and interrogate it so that they can reach an understanding. Every interpreter is entitled to his own particular semantic horizon and when he faces the text he reaches his own particular interpretation, understanding and reading. Since there are many interpreters, there can be numberless understandings. Of course, as every understanding is the result of a dialectical dialogue with the text, they are all valid and evident. There can be no invalid reading. On the other hand, the realization of understanding proves the realization of its validity.

Therefore, if one accepts that understanding the text is nothing but the text's answers to the interpreter's questions, and on the other hand, if one accepts that there is no limit to the interference of pre-judgments and questions raised by the interpreter, then the endlessness of understanding will seem natural. Thus one can never claim that to have reached the perfect and ultimate meaning.

8.4.3. Different Understanding not Better Understanding

As regards the principle, "A moment of truth is always accessible", Gadamer states that every interpreter plays a different part in achieving the truth. A better understanding requires the compression of truths in order to have access to a larger portion of truth or the whole of it. It alludes to the denial of truth, which is never achieved in compression or perfection. Thus he mentions that there is essentially no appropriate, perfect and definite interpretation.⁶⁷ Basically we cannot be sure that our interpretation is correct or better than previous interpretations.⁶⁸

Michael Inwood writes that interpretation presupposes a historically determined pre-understanding, a horizon; it involves a "fusion of horizons", of the past and the present. We cannot be sure that our interpretation is correct or better than previous interpretations; our interpretation, and our verdict on previous interpretations is open to future revision.⁶⁹

Gadamer implies that one could not possibly judge between various interpretations of a text and mark an understanding better than other understandings. Gadamer's hermeneutic principles dictate such a supposition since "understanding" is the agreement of every interpreter with the text and its fusion with the semantic horizon. So there is no accessible criterion to judge about the superiority of one understanding over other ones. Therefore, one could only say that he understands the text differently and not necessarily better than others.⁷⁰

However, Hirsch gives importance to the validity, the existence of a criterion giving priority as well as the preference of one meaning to others. He asserts that it will not be the science of hermeneutics which does not deal with validity.⁷¹

8.4.3.1. Absence of Idle Talk in the Words of God and His Prophet

If one accepts such a view on hermeneutics - that interpretation is based on presupposition, mentality of the interpreter and culture of the age, that understanding is limitless, and that there is no priority of one interpretation over the other - it will lead one to think that there is idle talk in the words of God and the Prophet's sayings as well as action. It is clear that the Qur'an and the Prophet revolted against idols and idolatry. In the absence of a criterion or rule for giving priority to one interpretation

over others and in case all interpretations correspond to the truth, what would fighting against idolatry mean? For idolatry is a sort of reading and interpretation of (the concept of) theism, while idolaters used to say that their idols brought them closer to God. Here is a Qur'anic verse about this: *والذين اتخذوا من دونه اولياء ما نعبدهم الا ليقربونا الى الله زلفى* (But those who take for protectors other than Allah (say): "We only serve them in order that they may bring us nearer to Allah.").⁷²

Then according to the hermeneutic perspective of Heidegger and Gadamer one should say that idolaters had such an understanding of theism within their specific mental horizon; the Prophet also had a different reading and there is no criterion to prefer the Prophet's interpretation to that of the idolaters. Needless to say, this is a false statement. Such an attitude is unacceptable when trying to interpret religion. It will turn the Divine word into idle talk while one knows that the Divine message has been revealed for mankind on the basis of wisdom and rationality by His Messengers. Its aim is to guide human beings, based on appropriate and logical interpretation and corresponding to the truth. When all interpretations correspond to the truth, the result will be misguidance of mankind.

8.4.3.2. The Difference between Understanding and Interpretation

As previously mentioned, Gadamer believes that every understanding is a kind of interpretation. "Understanding" and "interpretation" do not stand against each other. When one studies a text he interprets it in his mind, even before retelling it to others. The conclusion is that difference in interpretation is a token for difference in understanding. Hirsch had emphasized that interpretation is a by-product of understanding. When a text is not understood and its meaning not perceived, one will not be able to interpret it. Thus he asserts, "When Gadamer and his followers noticed the difference in interpretation and also the difficulty of judging the accurate from inaccurate interpretations, they claimed that there is no fixed criterion for the accuracy of interpretations, and that all interpretations are the same and correct in their context. Nevertheless, this is not true."⁷³

Allameh Tabatabai also, like Hirsch, considers understanding and interpretation as two separate domains. That of understanding is the meanings and concepts of Qur'anic verses; that of interpretation, however, goes beyond the domain of understanding. According to this theory all those familiar with Arabic literature can

understand the meaning and concepts of the verses and they cannot find one single incomprehensible verse.

In contrast to understanding, interpretation of Qur'anic verses, which is related to the Divine intentions, could be accomplished only by qualified interpreters. In other words, interpretation is where there a hidden matter waiting to be discovered by means of interpretation.

The point noted by Allameh Tabatabai is that although Qur'anic verses are all understandable this understanding is of the customary and ordinary type which depends on association and habit. This type is not always capable of leading man to the true intentions of God. It needs a scholarly and methodical understanding which is termed "interpretation" in the discipline of Qur'anic Sciences.⁷⁴

8.5. Semantic Plurality of the Text

Prior to Heidegger and Gadamer (that is before philosophical hermeneutics), the common belief was that every text has a single and specific meaning which is the one intended by the writer. Thus hermeneutics stands as an art or technique along the path for discovering this ultimate and single meaning. Nevertheless, philosophical hermeneutics denies this idea stating that the discovery of the author's intention is the goal and motivation of textual interpretation. At the same time, it paves the way for the acceptance of semantic pluralism.

Gadamer takes understanding merely to be juxtaposing the text against the present age. He also justified the "semantic plurality" of the text through his belief in a question-answer dialogue between interpreter and text, which leads to the meaning of the text through the questions raised by the interpreter. According to this view, the meaning of the text is nothing but its response to the question by the interpreter. As the questions are various and plural, various responses will result which will constitute the meaning. As Gadamer states, "To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question."⁷⁵

If there can be no presuppositionless interpretation, then the notion of one "right interpretation" as right in itself is a through less ideal and an impossibility. There is no interpretation without relationship to the present, and this is never permanent and

fixed. A transmitted text, be it Bible or Shakespearean play, has to be understood in the hermeneutical situation in which it finds itself, i.e., in relation to the present.⁷⁶

So the meaning of the text is more than what is intended by the author and what has been said in the text. One could always experience new meanings in different hermeneutic situations as well as through new questions. As Gadamer writes:

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question – a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it.⁷⁷

Therefore philosophical hermeneutics is of a pluralistic nature. It introduces a definite type of pluralism. That is, with the help of this knowledge and while dealing with hermeneutics one faces various interpretations. At the end of the day, of course, a number of opponent interpretations remain, none of which could be omitted by another.⁷⁸ As Gadamer recognizes, in *Truth and Method*, the criterion and validity of interpretations is their power to compete and remain. Among the abundant interpretations, called "the jungle of interpretations" by Hirsch which criticizes Gadamer⁷⁹, an interpretation is postulated as valid which has sufficiently reached the level of other interpretations.⁸⁰

8.5.1. Extremist Attitude towards Plurality of Textual Reading

An extremist attitude on plurality of reading a text is that all texts are exposed to different readings and essentially have different meanings. Thus there is no limit to this matter. Yet none of the meanings has priority over others because there is no criterion or standard to determine the domain of reading a text.

They introduce two analyses to substantiate this theory. The first is that understanding the text is all about the centrality of the interpreter's mentality. The interpreter encounters the text with pre-judgment and a particular expectation and imposes his mentality on it. He comprehends the text as he expects and presupposes.

According to this analysis of the nature of understanding and interpretation, all interpretations are subjective. It is impossible to refrain from subjective interpretation. The other analysis of the nature of understanding the text is that textual interpretation is the common product of the interpreter's and reader's mentality and semantic horizon, on the one hand, and the text's semantic horizon, on the other. Fusion of the two horizons makes this event of understanding happen. The reader has a dialogue with the text while understanding the text is the result of this sort of interaction. According to this analysis, the text can be subject to endless numbers of interpretations. So there is always a chance to read a text in a different way. One major element for understanding, which is the text itself, is fixed but the other major element, which is the reader and his semantic horizon, is changing. It is possible, then, to have various dialogues between text and interpreters the result of which is a single text open to a limitless number of readings.

The major difference between the two analyses on the one hand and the traditional and common assumption of the nature of understanding the text – which is on a parallel with the assumption of Muslim interpreters – on the other hand, is one point: the traditional position of understanding the text is "author-oriented". The aim of reading a text, according to this position, is to understand the intention of the other. However, the above-mentioned analyses completely exclude the author and stress the role of the reader and interpreter.

One could say then, unlike modern hermeneutics, Hirsch and Tabatabai regard the author's role in the process of understanding as basic and vital. They suggest that the aim of understanding is to search for the intention of the author. Doubtless, one could not verify the legitimacy and acceptability of all different readings of the text because the author follows a specific intention through his sentences in spoken or written form. One could not claim that every meaning striking the mind of the reader has been intended by the writer. Therefore, according to this analysis, not every understanding and meaning of the text is valid. Only a meaning which either corresponds to the author's intention or, at least, is obtained methodically, and is defensible on the basis of the rational method of understanding the text is valid.⁸¹

8.5.2. Appointment of Meaning

Doubtless, there is a special relation between form and content which brings the relevant meaning to the mind as soon as the words are imagined. Here is the first question in this regard: What is the root of the relationship between words and meaning? Is it a conventional or natural relationship, or both? The debate over the basis of the relationship between words and meaning has been in the air since the time of the Greek philosophers.⁸² It is a topic for scientific circles of today treated partly in books on the philosophy of language as well as the Science of Principles of jurisprudence. There are three attitudes among scholars on this subject :

- The natural attitude which recognizes that the relationship between pronunciation and meaning as essential.⁸³
- The conventional attitude which recognizes the relationship between pronunciation and meaning as dependent on the founder.⁸⁴
- The attitude which assumes that the relationship is sometimes conventional and sometimes natural.⁸⁵

The three attitudes have advocates. However, Allameh Tabatabai and most scholars in general take the pronunciation-meaning relationship as conventional in nature. Whether the relationship is natural or conventional, the appointment of meaning is essential. A pronunciation could not possibly have a natural and essential relationship with various and sometimes contradictory meanings. Neither is it possible to clearly set pronunciation to meanings, to imagine various meanings and set them a pronunciation. On the other hand, the interpreter is always after the meaning of a text which is made up of linguistic signs combined by special rules. Through knowledge of the rules and the application of the signs, the interpreter attempts to reach the meaning of the text. Common understanding dictates that the text carries something fixed and definite called meaning, which could be read by the interpreter when he opens the door to the world of the text. Thus one often talks about the meaning and whether the notion realized is the meaning of the text or not. To be more precise, the interpreter might reach the meaning or he might misunderstand the text and fall short of its meaning⁸⁶. In short, the theory favoured

by Allameh Tabatabai says the meaning of text is fixed and definite; the interpreter makes efforts to perceive that single meaning.

8.5.3. Ways to Prove that Meaning is One for the Writer

There are certain ways to prove the appointment of meaning for the speaker and writer:

- A. Every single individual while consulting his conscience will come to terms with the fact that he never finds an indeterminate concept in his own mind. When it comes to utterance, he would express these concepts which are already determinate. Even those who regard a certain text as indeterminate, when they embark on writing a text decline to allow their writings to be affected by the passage of time and change of traditions. They attempt to make their audience acquainted with their own determinate thoughts. Thus, intuitively speaking, we realize that every single concept by virtue of intuitive knowledge roams within a framework. Others too would like to express their concepts and finally make them understandable to the audience. Thus they have some appointed meaning in mind and would reproduce it and have it copied in the minds of the audience.
- B. The method of explanation and understanding shows that one first has some meaning in mind and to express it chooses suitable words to signify that meaning and say it. This way, he could communicate his ideas to his audience. Whatever appears in the mind is a specific being within a specific framework. There is always a particular meaning beyond the words, which is intended for communication with the audience. That particular meaning is spoken by the speaker and written by the writer.

Absence of appointment of meaning in the mind implies that basically there has been no concept or meaning in the speaker's mind and that he has merely used a form which has yielded to different meanings throughout the ages. So one ought to either deny the existence of meaning in the mind or accept its appointment. Therefore, one could say, "speakers and writers who are knowledgeable and serious harbour special meaning in their minds". They try to select a form which is a match for it, set for it and signifies it. This way the intended meaning is communicated to the audience; though they sometimes make mistakes in assigning the correct word. Thus a different

meaning is conveyed to the perceiver. This matter is not true in respect of religious texts such as the Holy Qur'an, because it is not possible to realize a mistake in the Divine word.

- C. Thinking about the philosophy of language and its cause can substantiate the appointment of meaning in the mind of the speaker. So the need for understanding and communicating with each other in human society is the cause of the emergence of language in a nation.⁸⁷ The philosophy of language requires that the meaning in the author's mind be capable of reproduction in the mind of the audience. There is no chance of understanding each other without such a capability for the meaning which exists in the mind of the speaker or writer. On the other hand, meaning is capable of being reproduced if it has been appointed; otherwise, the speaker and audience could not have something in common because there is no appointed matter of common interest. Then the philosophy of language requires that the meaning harbouring in the speaker's mind has the capability of reproduction. Therefore, even if the imaginary signified by a word is not appointed, the user of a word has to determine the confirmatory signified by means of evidence from the statement.⁸⁸

According to the latter reasoning, one discovers the existence of the cause (appointment of meaning) through an examination of the effect (the quality of reproduction) – by pondering on the philosophy of language. In the former two cases of reasoning, however, one reaches the effect (the quality of reproduction) through discovery of the cause (appointment of meaning). In short, appointment of meaning in the speaker's mind and its reproducing quality can be substantiated in different ways. So one may introduce the appointed meaning in the speaker's mind as the true meaning of the text as the criterion for evaluating understandings and interpretations.⁸⁹

Therefore, Hirsch's statements about the necessity of the two qualities, the quality of reproduction and the quality of appointment in interpretation of the text,⁹⁰ corresponds to the principles of Shiite interpretations.

8.5.4. Rejecting the Theory of Plurality in Reading Religion

What is intended by difference in reading is the same as difference in the understanding of religion.

If religious texts showed a map, reading religion would mean locating countries, cities, rivers, and so on on that map. Ultimately, it would entail the understanding of the map with all its details and the various signs on it. As if reading a map, a reader reads a religious text locating the relationship and position of every statement and discovering its message. However, reading a text is similar to yet different from reading a map. In the process of reading a map, one attempts to find its secrets, identify its signs and finally find out about the location of each city, country, river and so on. In reading a text, one also should try to identify its codes and locate the position of every statement and identify their relationship with each other. Reading a map is to reach the geography of cities and countries on the globe, while reading a text is an effort to discover the geography of the material hidden in there. However, the two readings deal with two different maps and geographies. In a geographical map, the real geography of the globe is registered on a much smaller scale with signs and symbols. This type of map, in fact, is a geometrical image of real geography on a smaller scale. The signs on it have different functions and roles, some show the relationship between cities and roads, and some represent the ups and downs and height from sea level. On the other hand, one does not face an image of another reality on a smaller scale. This text communicates a message to the reader. The different parts interact with each other to communicate the message to the audience. Likewise, the function of the interpreter is to draw the "geography of the text", clarify the role of each part and understand its true message. It is in the geography of the text that the message of the text and the interactions among its different parts becomes clear, and the position of each point and statement is precisely defined.

By means of the above-mentioned example, one can introduce a distinction in the discussion and pose a disparity between two types of difference in readings. This difference is an account of the fate of difference in readings.

If a geographical map is exposed to two people and they read it in different ways, the difference will be in one of the following two forms:

- A. The two people sometimes differ in some cases. For examples, what city or country is at that particular point on the map? In other cases, they agree to some extent and achieve a single reading. This type of difference of readings is called either *local diversity of readings* or *partial diversity of readings*.
- B. Sometimes the two persons can find no common agreement in regard to this map. Each reads it in his own particular way. Here there is merely a pivot of difference and no common point among them; it is as if each speaks of a different world and considers himself an inhabitant of a different planet with this map as an image of its geographical face. This type of difference of readings is called either *global diversity of readings* or *universal diversity of readings*. These two types of readings are also possible in the process of reading religious texts at first glance - a reading which is completely different from another reading with absolutely no common ground between them.⁹¹

8.5.4.1. Communication of Religious Texts

Every religious text communicates a message intended to change the audience. The text does this via different methods. It occurs sometimes by narration, natural phenomena and natural manifestation, and sometimes by command, prohibition, promise or similar methods - all to attract the audience to the arena of religion and changing it through communicating the message of the text. One could understand such matters by paying little attention to Qur'anic verses – which is the major text in Islam. For example, one can find narrated in the Qur'an with preciseness some events in the life of the Prophet which sometimes belong to the unseen annals.⁹² Had not God expressed these histories through revelation they would have remained hidden in history: *لك من انباء الغيب نوحيه اليك و ما كنت لديهم إذا اجمعوا امرهم و هم يمكرون* (Such is one of the stories of what happened unseen, which We reveal by inspiration unto thee; nor wast thou (present) with them then, when they concerted their plans together in the process of weaving their plots).⁹³ The narration of these unseen histories happens alongside the message of the text and is expressed with an aim: *لقد كان فى قصصهم عبرة لأولي الألباب ما كان حديثا يفترى و لكن تصديق الذى بين يديه و تفصيل كل شئ و رحمة لقوم يؤمنون* (There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it - a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy to any such as believe).⁹⁴ The Qur'an's commands, prohibitions and promises all are more or less connected to

its original message which may be a complex matter with its quality encompassing various parts.

8.5.4.2. The Original Message of the Text

The original message of the text is the same as the essential message of the text, while other matters are somehow irrelevant to the original method and extrinsic, since they are not directly related to the aim or major motivations of the emergence of the text, which is a medium for a specific message to the audience, and it is subsidiary to the major theme. Of course, it is not foreign to the text; rather it does not contribute to the major premise of the text. For example, it is quite possible to have in the text some material by way of introduction and to psychologically prepare the audience for understanding the major theme, which is extrinsic here; nevertheless, it is not unfamiliar to the text or its major theme. Therefore, what is regarded as the major message in a text is to be called *intrinsic matter* while a matter that plays no role in the major method is to be called *extrinsic matter*. Thus the two matters are distinguished.⁹⁵

8.5.4.3. The Result of the Difference between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Message of the Text

To distinguish between the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of the text has two advantages, which could be made clear if one raises two questions:

First Question: How to know that a particular text is different from the other?

Second Question: How to distinguish between correct and incorrect understanding?

The first question deals with the problem of the *sameness of the text*. When one reads a text, he might say whether it is or is not the same as the previous text. Distinguishing between "sameness" or difference of texts is done according to the essential basis of the text. In other words, when the reader notices that the message of the two texts is the same and the differences – in case they exist – exist merely in extrinsic matters, he will decide on sameness. Once he realizes that the major message of the two texts is different, he will definitely judge it as difference and not sameness.

The second question is more fundamental since every theory on the difference in reading has to respond to it by means of a persuasive answer. The distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic nature in a text provides the best explanation for distinguishing between correct and incorrect understandings. The incorrect understanding occurs because it violates the intrinsic or essential aspect of the text. On the other hand, correct understanding is essential to the text. If understanding causes a change in the essential aspect of the text it will be incorrect; otherwise, it will be correct.⁹⁶

As regards the intrinsic and extrinsic difference of the text, one could say that in the case of a general and comprehensive difference of readings, the essential message of the text is completely deformed and changed. The original message disappears and a different message comes into view to the reader, which has not been intended by the writer. It is so when one believes in the general difference of readings; otherwise, in cases of partial or regional difference, the main or essential message remains unchanged and unharmed.

Therefore, in the light of the intrinsic and extrinsic distinction of a text, one could reject the general difference of readings. That happens especially in religious texts in which God and His prophets introduce a message for mankind to prepare the ground for his guidance. In case of the general difference of readings, this message and aim will change.

Thus Allameh Tabatabai points out in regard to the separation of intrinsic meaning and extrinsic meaning: "The Qur'an is without and within both willed by discourse, only the two meanings carry the same intention intrinsically and not extrinsically. Neither the outside will of the word negates the inside will, nor does the inside will disturbs the outside will."⁹⁷ In this statement, he separates the intrinsic from the extrinsic meaning. When it is said that the Qur'an is multi-faceted it does not imply that the Holy Book contains contradictory meanings and that they are extrinsic to or opposite each other. On the contrary, these meanings enjoy an intrinsic relationship. They are all straightforward yet differ slightly.

Based on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic meaning, therefore, one could according to the theory of Tabatabai say: the meanings of the Qur'an are

definite from one vantage point and plural from another. According to the extrinsic meaning, Qur'anic meanings are definite. One could not attribute to the text other than the definite meaning. However, as far as the intrinsic meaning is concerned the indeterminacy of meaning is dominant, that is all meanings that stand essential to each other are attributable to the text. These essential meanings become determined by the understandings of the audience.

8.6. Relativity or Limitation of Understanding

Since the earliest times of philosophy, Relativism has been regarded as a reactionary process whose date of birth might be the same as that of Absolutism. Relativism has appeared with different meanings from the beginning to date: a criterion for the truth of mankind, a school of scepticism, a methodical criticism of Descartes to the mediator Kojito, a transcendental criticism of Kant through the mediation of statements and evaluation of pure intellect, variety of interpretations, plurality of textual meaning as well as dispersion of truth.⁹⁸ The last case leads to religious plurality in the philosophy of religion. Gadamer's Relativism is essentially different from other strategies in relativity. In his philosophy, Relativism is the expectation and welcoming of the truth and belief in the imperfection of understandings and incompleteness of interpretations.⁹⁹ Understanding, in his theory, never ends. It always undergoes recreation and change. One's understanding always depends on the position and the particular historical and cultural stance of the age. Since every individual and every interpreter, in particular, interprets a text on the basis of his own position, stance, prejudices and expectation, doubtless there will be many understandings. One can never regard an understanding as perfect and absolute although many of such understandings might be true. Therefore, relativity, according to Gadamer, happens in respect of difference of interpretations and readings as well as plurality of truths.

According to Gadamer discovering the author's intention is impossible. He proceeds towards understanding various meanings of a work by the reader with priority of language to get to know the world which is influenced and inspired by Heidegger's philosophy and ideas. Yet Hirsch, who believes in the hermeneutic responsibility in the reproduction of the true intention or meaning of the text states: "If meaning is not immutable and fixed, there will be no objectivity of interpretation, since

understanding every phenomenon depends on awareness not related to diction.”¹⁰⁰ However, Gadamer insists on his belief and even criticizes the viewpoint of Habermas. The latter scholar emphasizes the self-escape of an anti-positivistic viewpoint in social sciences and takes side with Gadamer. However, Habermas criticizes Gadamer's inclination to relativity and his refutation of a definite criterion for judgment as well as his critical perspective on the basis of ontology.¹⁰¹

What is meant by relativity in Gadamer's hermeneutics is that the individuals' definition and belief in truth is not the same; they differ according to the different interpretations. Finding a single, definite, final and perfect criterion, which goes beyond history and is able to make it a permanent possibility to evaluate and compare validities and perceptions of individuals, is by itself impossible. The value and efficiency of every criterion we find is relative and dependent on the historical, cultural and social position, which has facilitated the perceptions. In other words, various validities of individuals are contextualized in "*the horizon of expectations and the horizon of significations and interpretations*". Thus one could conclude that, as a first step, all perceptions are equally different from the truth. Then some criteria are formulated for evaluating and comparing the validities according to the agreements. The point is that none of the criteria are natural and everlasting and that there is no ultimate, eternal and definite criterion. One should also know that this relative criterion changes with the change of historical, social and cultural position. The credibility criterion of all perceptions or interpretations is the same. Every interpretation creates its own particular horizon of expectations, together with new solutions.

8.6.1. Philosophical Hermeneutics and Anarchism

In his *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch first introduces and criticizes Gadamer's idea on the repudiation of the author's intention and then points out that Gadamer believes that the meaning of the text exists independent of the author's intention and is always beyond the meaning intended by the author. This belief results in the necessity of uncertainty of textual meaning as well as abundance of interpretations, so that no one will be the absolute truth.¹⁰² This is why Hirsch criticizes Gadamer's relativity in the interpretation of the text: interpretation is a valid and appropriate action only when the text is not ambiguous and has one meaning.¹⁰³

Anyway, the crux of Gadamer's statement is that there is no criterion to judge the various interpretations which are obtained from a text, to validate one interpretation and invalidate others. The result is a sort of relativism in respect of textual understanding. Thus one could claim that philosophical hermeneutics produces anarchism. The reason is that this kind of hermeneutics turns the accessibility to non-relative knowledge and then to impossibility. Inevitably, with the emergence of relative understanding, anarchism becomes unavoidable. Is anarchism other than confusion? Neither is relativism different from confusion. If we go back to ancient Greece, the sceptists point out, "what I believe is true, is true to me; what you believe is true, is true to you; also what I know as good is good for me; what you know as good is good for you."¹⁰⁴ Will not this type of attitude to the problem be anything but confusion at the stage of understanding as well as action? In this extremist form, philosophical hermeneutics is nothing but anarchism whose drive is nothing but confusion in the sphere of thought and action. It is because, due to philosophical hermeneutics, objective understanding or textual understanding which matches truth is unattainable, that is the pre-judgments and pre-knowledge prevent such understanding. All understandings are affected by pre-judgments of interpreters, which come under the influence of tradition and history. Tradition and history lack fixity and stasis. In such a tableau drawn by philosophical hermeneutics of the concept of understanding, there is no place for absolutism, determinism and the belief in the existence of fixed and permanently true issues; so perceptions will be relative, fluid and capricious. Accordingly, on the basis of the principle of philosophical hermeneutics, everything is regarded as relative while the concept of certain or absolute meaning is altogether denounced. This is because this matter regards the presuppositions or pre-understandings as an obstacle to achieve certainty. However, this is a void claim: the existence of such presuppositions and pre-understandings might be (as mentioned earlier) treated in some way and be no more an obstacle on the way of achieving certainty. It is true that when one faces a text one is exposed to many presuppositions; the important thing is that one is not supposed to be entangled by the maze of the presuppositions in order to avoid being a victim of relativism.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, one of the most important critiques on Gadamer's hermeneutics is his inclination to relativism and disbelief in definiteness in understanding and meaning.

As mentioned earlier, Hirsch wrote in his treatise that were meaning not fixed and immutable (and perception not complete with the definition of relativity applied to it), there would be no objectivity of interpretation.¹⁰⁶ So he believed that if there were no objectivity at all, he would still be sure about one objectivity, that is the immutable and definite meaning.¹⁰⁷ He asserts that if the textual meaning were not the author's intention but the meaning obtained by the interpreter from the text, then there would be no true meaning. Gadamer believed in the multiplicity of meaning, considered the interpreter of key importance and looked for an attitude of relativity and insisted on it. He explicitly expresses his conjecture that he should accept that there is no absolutely appropriate standard and understanding. He points out, "Essentially, there is no correct and definite interpretation."¹⁰⁸ Text is not the expression of the author's intention and attention; rather it is the mixing and fusion of two semantic horizons, that is of the interpreter and the author. Thus one is not supposed to look for a perfect understanding and interpretation. Therefore, if there is an understanding, it will undoubtedly be a mutable and relative perception.¹⁰⁹

8.6.2. Suicide of the Theory of Gadamer

Some theories pave the way for their own suicide, the first victim of the theory being the theory itself. Gadamer's theory, by some chance, falls into this category; it nullifies itself. The reason is based on his own claim postulating that every text read by man could not achieve truth due to the mental formations and presuppositions; but the truth is formed in his mental formations.

This theory itself, the product of reading dozens of texts, is no exception to the rule. That is by reading religious and non-religious texts, Gadamer has formed his general understanding about reading texts in his mind and concluded that reading every text follows the mind of the interpreter himself and that it never reports on the truth. One could claim that this idea itself is not absolute but it is the fruit of the formations essential for the human mind. Thus this theory is relatively true and limited to the particular mental limitations of its writer (Gadamer). How could one then take it as an absolute principle and use it for interpretations of all readings in a general and absolute way? It is really strange that they regard all readings as relative but they consider their own readings from among all other readings as an absolute one, while there is no justifiable reason for this exception.¹¹⁰

8.6.3. Nullity of Relativism from a Religious Perspective

On the other hand, the belief in Relativism and Scepticism is null not only from the philosophical and epistemological but also from the religious perspective. If Relativism were acceptable it would lead to the rejection of the missions of the prophets and the sending of the divine books, that is that Divine guidance becomes practically redundant. The issue of Scepticism and Relativism as religious issues might be discussed from two positions.

8.6.3.1. Disagreement of Relativism and Scepticism with Faith

It is clear that certainty is the essential element for faith. There would be no faith in God without certainty. One could not be a faithful person (to God) when we witness traces of doubt in Him. Neither is it possible to imagine a person with faith in the Prophet while doubtful of his prophecy. Simply, faith is not realized without certainty. There are some verses in the Qur'an which imply that doubt regarding the existence of God or the Prophet is by itself infidelity or very close to it: *افى الله شك فاطر السموات و الارض* (Is there a doubt about Allah, The Creator of the heavens and the earth?)¹¹¹

The style of question and answer in this verse shows the unacceptability of doubt and the necessity for certainty.

Among the verses that necessitate the rejection of relativism are those in which the Qur'an is described as "light" and the book of "guidance." Certainty is essential for the Divine guidance: *قد جاءكم من الله نور و كتاب مبين* (There hath come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book)¹¹²

8.6.3.2. Disagreement of Scepticism with the Essentials of Religion

One could reflect on the disagreement of Relativism with the essentials of religion from two aspects. Firstly, Relativism and Scepticism negate the essentials of religion as religious essentials are matters of beliefs and commands already proved and taken for granted in religion; secondly, Scepticism stands against the principle of grasping the religious essentials. When we refer to, let us say, "the Hereafter" and "Heaven and Hell", they are among the essentials of religion meaning that it has already been

proved and granted that they are “a part of religion or its mean.”. Naturally, this aspect of the essentials opposes even the epistemological Scepticism.¹¹³

Conclusion

Since this dissertation is a comparative study of works by Hirsch and

Tabatabai whose philosophical and interpretive perspectives are mostly reflected in his book *Al-Mizan*, a whole chapter (Chapter Five) has been allocated for this purpose in order to examine significant features of the book. The method of exegesis of the Qur'an in this book is interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. Therefore, verses of the Qur'an are regarded as an integrated collection, in a way that every verse can be a context or a sign to reach a satisfactory understanding of the verses. Basically, ambiguities of some verses would be removed through reference to other verses. Such a method of interpretation has no precedence amongst interpretive books of both Shiites and Sunnites. For this reason nowadays *Al-Mizan* is very popular among Muslim scholars, being regarded as one of the most important interpretive resources among the Shiites. It is hard to find a Shiite scholar who does not refer to *Al-Mizan* in order to solve his interpretive problems with the Qur'an.

Al-Mizan, generally speaking, is a systematic exegesis; nevertheless, thematic interpretation has also been considered. Tabatabai, through his emphasis on the relationship between verses in terms of their content and the concept, puts together a set of verses and then deals with a philosophical or historical subject in order to draw a general conclusion and presents it as a Qur'anic idea. As a matter of fact, he prepares a satisfactory ground for other exegetes to incline towards the thematic. It is worth noting that following Tabatabai this method of Qur'anic exegesis has replaced systematic exegesis to a great extent. One of the most significant interpretive features of Tabatabai is to give significance to intellectual reasons in understanding the Qur'anic verses. In *Al-Mizan* as well as his other works, he constantly emphasizes that it is necessary to refrain from superstition and intellectually contradictory stories in interpreting the Qur'an. He strongly believes that efforts must be made to omit all historical points and traditions which are incompatible with reason in exegesis since the Qur'an itself invites mankind to contemplate and utilize a rational method. That is why Tabatabai discusses philosophical subjects in *Al-Mizan*, to examine a number of Qur'anic concepts through logical reasons as well as intellectual proofs. Using this

intellectual method in interpreting the Qur'an, his intention is to study various historical and social affairs. He scrutinizes modern major contemporary discussions according to Qur'anic, scientific and intellectual foundations as the Qur'an has a connection with all sciences and daily needs of human life. It also urges human beings to acquire a knowledge of the sciences and all that plays a role in the prosperity of the human race.

Among various perspectives of Muslim scholars concerning the possibility of understanding Qur'anic verses, Tabatabai strongly believes that all verses of the Qur'an are understandable and that there are no verses therein which are incomprehensible. He relies on numbers of Qur'anic verses to substantiate his own ideas, in addition to the rational proofs. He concludes through this evidence that everybody can appreciate and benefit from Qur'anic verses. This idea is in contrast to a group of exegetes of the Qur'an who hold that basically it is impossible for modern man to understand its verses for it was aimed at the primary addressees.

One considerable point in the interpretive works of Tabatabai is to differentiate between *understanding* and *interpretation*. He regards the former as common understanding and the latter as a methodical and scholarly understanding. In other words, according to Tabatabai, that understanding which is realized after the process of interpreting of the text will be the scholarly and final one which occurs through particular conditions and principles. This is approximately the same as the *understanding skill* which has been used by Hirsch. Similarity between Hirsch's theory with regard to the understanding skill and Tabatabai's idea of *scholarly and final understanding* is that both are seeking the author's intention. Furthermore, words as well as sentences constituting a text are subject to both theories to enable an interpreter to reach the intention of the author. Moreover, the fact that the understanding skill is based on Hirsch's perspective is the only method for understanding the text, that is to say, the method of text by text. In this method an interpreter reaches an understanding of the meaning with the help of words and sentences.

Tabatabai and Hirsch although agreed on oneness as well as determination of textual meaning, have different ideas in some other respects. For instance, Tabatabai believes that although the meaning is one and determined, it enjoys many accessible

layers of meaning if a qualified interpreter utilizes the principles and criteria of the interpretation. Of course, it is possible that some layers of meaning of the verses are not evident at the time, but will become so later with the advancement of learning. Hirsch, however, considers just a single meaning for the text with no layers. He asserts that what an interpreter understands of the text is the same as the intention of the author. It will never change – no matter what time or place, or what cultural or geographical situation. One point of difference which is observed in the theories of Tabatabai and Hirsch in interpretation relates to the interpreter. According to Tabatabai, discovering the intention of God in Qur’anic verses depends on the preparations and qualifications of the religious interpreter, as opposed to the interpreter of literature, who has no need of such a background. Interpreting a “human written text” does not need all the skills and knowledge of interpretation; merely knowledge around the subject is required. But interpretation of the Qur’an needs many different skills, because it possesses a wealth of knowledge for mankind and the interpreter has to be sure to get across the message of its spiritual awareness.

As has been mentioned earlier, in the Hermeneutics of Hirsch Understanding skill is the same as Tabatabai’s *tafsir* (Interpretation).. However, what is called *descriptive skill* by Hirsch, is not similar to the “*tafseer*”, according to Tabatabai since *tafseer* is to discover the intention of God while according to Hirsch descriptive skill is employed to explain the same thing that is understood by the interpreter. It corresponds to the literal meaning of *tafseer*: explanation of the text and not referring to its idiomatic meaning.

In addition to Understanding and Interpretation, Hirsch mentions two other functions for every literary text which are *Judgement* and *Criticism*. According to him, the first two functions are related to *Verbal meaning* but other functions are connected to *Significance*. He stipulates that Hermeneutics or interpretation does not apply to the two functions of Judgement and Criticism. However, according to Tabatabai, these two functions can be applied to interpretation as they have roles in discovering the author’s intention. It is worth noting that a number of works of exegesis of the Qur’an, including *Al-Mizan*, have been compiled with attention to these functions. It is because, according to Tabatabai and some other Muslim interpreters, in order to find out about the intention of God, an interpreter needs to consider certain modern

sciences as well as philosophical and mystical inclinations which are effective in exegesis of the Qur'an.

“The aims of interpretation” is one of the most significant similarities in the works of Hirsch and Tabatabai which both regard as the achievement of the author's intention as the basic purpose of interpretation. On that basis, the only criterion to distinguish a valid interpretation from an invalid one is “the intention of the author”. Basically, the meaning of the text is just what the author has intended. That is to say, the same meaning, which is fixed, can be conveyed to others. The words conventionally are for indicating the meaning: they are employed as signs for meaning. The speaker intends a meaning at first and then exposes that through the words. As a matter of fact, written things could be signs for words and also words could be signs for meaning.

Tabatabai emphasises that the correct and definite understanding is possible only when words or writing are used by the author accurately and that the text is read correctly by the reader in order to arrive at the meaning in his mind. So, both sides of the process must be carried out exactly to reach the accurate meaning. He has made a vast study of *the principles of jurisprudence* in which the preliminary subjects concerning interpretation of Qur'anic texts have been discussed and he has raised certain new ideas on this subject for which he is highly regarded as being among the most prominent Shiite scholars in this field.

Tabatabai and Hirsch are after a proper method of interpretation, which is different from philosophical hermeneutics, which deals with the essence of understanding that has been discussed in Chapter 7 in detail. Both believe that it is possible to reach the final meaning of the text. Although Tabatabai makes a distinction between divine texts and human texts, he agrees to try to discover the final meaning as a whole. He puts forward a long discussion to prove the fact that there are valid ways and proper principles for interpretation as well as finding out the final meaning of the text, including “the authority of the appearance of the words” which must be followed by an interpreter. It should be mentioned that although both Tabatabai and Hirsch agreed on the finality of meaning of the text, there is some disagreement about how to reach that.

The problem of “the apparent and the secret meaning of the Qur’an” is one of the great discussions in *Al-Mizan*, comparable to Hirsch’s theory of Significance that plays the key role in his criticism of the hermeneutics of Gadamer. Tabatabai stipulates that a Qur’anic text has various meanings, in addition to its apparent meaning. In other words, a verse sometimes comprises different layers in terms of meaning, related to its apparent meaning taking into account the conditions of the time and place as well as paying attention to the particular perspectives of the interpreter. In fact, the apparent meaning can apply to all of the meaning. In this way, among the possible meanings of a verse, its apparent meaning is the one that is clearer than other meanings; however, the other meanings are regarded as the “secret meaning” of the verse.

The main difference between Tabatabai and Hirsch with regard to Significance and “the secret meaning of the Qur’an” is that according to Hirsch Significance does not apply to hermeneutics, as it has no role in discovering the author’s intention and the real meaning of the text. However, Tabatabai includes Significance in the field of interpretation as it helps in discovering the author’s intention. He persists in the possibility of utilizing modern science or any other knowledge (apart from related texts) to find out about the real meaning of the text. He himself interpreted many Qur’anic verses with the help of philosophical and mystical discussions. Of course, it is possible only when there is no contradiction between such an interpretation and some context or signs which usually exist in (the words of) the text. Tabatabai like Hirsch emphasises the authority of apparent meaning of the text and mentions a number of prepositions in order to prove his idea in interpretation of the text which are similar to Hirsch’s beliefs.

Tabatabai like Hirsch also stipulates that interpreters mostly follow and attempt to discuss the author’s intention in the text. In order to reach the author’s intention, the interpreter has to consider himself as a contemporary of the author. There is no choice for an interpreter except to try to fill the time gap between him and the author and also the time when the text was created. That is why Tabatabai insists on applying “the science of principles of jurisprudence” which was composed in order to reduce distance between the interpreter and author in finding out the author’s intention and mentality; that is to say, “the science of principles of jurisprudence”

provides general rules of understanding of common conversation to the interpreter to enable him to bring his cultural horizon nearer to the cultural horizon of the time when the text was created. However, according to Gadamer the author does not play any role in understanding the text, since he considers the text independent of the author and basically the aim of interpreting the text is not to perceive the author's intention. For this reason he is not after discovering what is in the author's mind. He emphasises that it is not necessary for the interpreter to attempt to realize the author's intention even if he is a contemporary of the author.

According to the author-oriented theory, which has been insisted on by all of the Muslims exegetes especially Tabatabai, the purpose of interpreting the text is to find out about the intention of the author. Nevertheless, the question is why there is disagreement on understanding the text and the intention of the author? This question has been answered in Chapter Eight on the basis of Tabatabaei's theories. Reasons for certain disagreements have been clarified there. Prejudgment in the process of understanding is one issue posed by Martin Heidegger about the interpretation of the text. He stipulates that understanding begins with the interpreter's curiosity. The interpreter opens the door of understanding and presents a meaning to the relevant subject. Thus understanding begins at the interpreter's prejudgment and pre-understanding.

According to Gadamer, prejudgment has the positive role in understanding the process and hermeneutical experience. There is no choice except the fact that it is impossible to attain understanding and interpretation without considering the prejudgment and suppositions. However, Tabatabai's attitude like Hirsch's is in disagreement with Gadamer and persists on negation of content interference of pre-judgements in the understanding process since interference of the interpreter's presupposition and intellectual traits leads to personal judgment and would be regarded as an imposition of one's ideas on the text. It is worth mentioning that understanding the text needs to have some primary pre-understanding. Fundamentally, an interpreter is never ignorant of some subjects but those subjects do not play the basic role in organizing the understanding and interpreting the text. That is why Chapter 8 has dealt with types of pre-understanding connected to the process of understanding the text, some of which can be considered in understanding

the text according to all Shiite exegetes especially Tabatabai, while some others are unacceptable because they become obstacles to the perception of the text. What Gadamer states about the interference of pre-judgements in understanding, inevitably stops criticism of interpretations as every person interprets texts on the basis of his / her relationship to cultural heritage, expectations, presuppositions and other kinds of questions. They will be similar to each other in terms of correctness and incorrectness and even an accurate interpretation is meaningless to Gadamer while many criticisms over various interpretations are very clearly noticed. There are some general principles and presuppositions of understanding for Qur'anic exegesis in Tabatabai's interpretive works, which indicate that he believes interpretation of the Holy Qur'an matches the general rules of textual interpretation. This perspective goes against those who regard the language of the Qur'an as a special language and insist that the Qur'an addresses a particular group who possess the key to understanding its verses.

According to Gadamer understanding is achieved by fusing the interpreter's semantic horizon and the semantic horizon of the text. As regards this point, it can be said that different interpreters with different semantic horizons face the text and pay attention to questions and answers in the text to obtain an understanding. As every interpreter has his / her own particular semantic horizon when confronting the text, they will have their own special interpretation and of course all readings as well as views are valid because each interpretation is achieved through a dialectical dialogue with the text. According to Tabatabai one of the interpreter's tasks in interpreting the text, is to confront it with question. However, it is unacceptable to say that the process of understanding always depends on questioning because it frequently happens that we open a book or magazine by chance and realize the meaning before we raise a single question on its content.

The natural bond between the word and meaning in every language makes the sentences meaningful. It is evident that understanding these sentences depends on one's knowledge of the language not the raising of questions. Tabatabai states that it is logical to accept the presuppositions of ours and the knowledge that pave the way for questioning the text. In other words, the interpreter has a role in raising the question not in producing and organizing the answer. As a matter of fact, the text

responds to the question not the interpreter in order to prevent him from imposing his personal idea on the text. Tabatabai more than other interpreters raises questions about the Qur'an and receives the answer from it. That is why his interpretive method is matchless among all other commentaries on the Qur'an. Tabatabai believes it is correct to say that the interpreter's mentality briefly interferes in the process of interpretation; however, that interference is not always related to the content of the text in a way the interpreter intends to impose his personal perspective on it. Interference is sometimes instrumental and at other times functions via questioning and interrogating.

The nature of philosophical hermeneutics is pluralistic, emphasising this point that the meaning of the text is more than what is intended by the author and even what has been expressed in it. It is possible to produce new meanings for the text in different hermeneutic conditions as well as through new questions. All of the new meanings can be considered as the meaning of the text and none of it could be replaced by another probable meaning. For this reason there will never be a preference for any of the meanings, rather all the likely meanings are acceptable.

Tabatabai and Hirsch both greatly oppose such an idea as they believe the author has a basic and pivotal role in the process of understanding. They state that the purpose of interpretation is to search for the intention of the author. It is obvious that one cannot gauge the correctness of all different readings and interpretations of the text because the author had a particular intention through his choice of words. It is not wise to say that every meaning that occurs in the mind of the reader has been intended by the author. Therefore, according to Tabatabai and Hirsch a meaning is valid only when it corresponds to the author's intention.

Tabatabai believes that meaning is determined. He emphasises that due to the existence of a particular connection between word and meaning, the meaning is conveyed by the word to the human mind. He regards the meaning as fixed while the interpreter's attempt is to reach that one meaning. Afterwards, he mentions certain proofs to prove the oneness of the meaning.

Tabatabai persists in rejecting the idea of plurality in the reading of religion. For him every religious text enjoys a message aimed at changing the audience. Something

like commandments, prohibitions, promises are all connected to the original message of the religious text, which is the same as its “essential message” while other methods are regarded as accidental messages. Of course, it is not alien to the text; rather it does not contribute to the original message of the text. So, the original matter and the accidental one should be separated from each other. This way one could say that in the case of a general and comprehensive difference of readings the essential message of the text is completely deformed and changed and another message comes into the reader’s mind which has not been intended by the author.

Regarding the religious texts in which God and his prophets carry a message for human beings to pave the way for their guidance, the message will be changed in case there is a general difference of readings or interpretations. Therefore, in cases of partial differences the essential message is not changed. To clarify this point, Tabatabai gives the example of the issue of the internal and external meaning of the Qur’anic verses: in addition to their apparent meaning they have a series of hidden meanings which exist alongside each other and not across each other. Thus there will be contradiction neither between the apparent meaning and internal meaning nor among the internal meanings themselves. All of these meanings can be attributed to the text and the meanings determined through the interpreter’s understanding of the Qur’an.

One of the most important points that can be seen in the book of *Al-Mizan* is rejection of the issue of Relativity. The proofs brought up by Tabatabai are similar to those of Hirsch. Relativism in the hermeneutics of Gadamer is the expectation and welcoming of the truth and belief in the incompleteness of understanding as well as interpretation. According to his theory understanding will never end; rather it constantly changes. He insists that we can never regard an understanding as perfect and absolute. Basically, all of the understandings are equal and there is no criterion to judge what is correct or incorrect. Relativism, in his theory, is connected to pluralism.

In response to this theory from Tabatabai and Hirsch’s perspective, one could say that philosophical Hermeneutics leads to anarchism for it precludes the possibility of non-relative knowledge. Basically, according to Tabatabai, belief in relativism is not void from the point of view of religious foundations. If it were acceptable, the

coming of the prophets as well as the descending of the Divine Books and as a result divine guidance would practically become meaningless and impossible. Furthermore, an inclination to relativism certainly damages man's faith. It is obvious that faith is not compatible with doubt or scepticism

It is worth mentioning that part of the Hermeneutical discussions is related to epistemology and deals with the nature of understanding and the condition or quality of its existence. It judges in such a way that its domain will include religious epistemology and the interpretation of text. Therefore, it builds a bridge between Hermeneutical discussions and religious epistemology. Hermeneutics is always intertwined with the interpretation of the text. Despite the many turns in the realm of its aims, it has always attached special importance to the understanding of the text. For this reason, any new theories in the field of Hermeneutics are bound to have an effect on Islamic disciplines.

One of the conclusions of this thesis is that the special attention to the importance of language and interpretation in Hermeneutics has made it into the main focus of attention in the contemporary world. Sciences such as Literal Criticism, Semiotics, Philosophy of Language and Theology, all of which have a comprehensive relationship with language and understanding of the text. Hermeneutics, especially Philosophical Hermeneutics, due to the introduction of radical perspectives, has posed new challenges in the above mentioned areas, in particular in Islamic text.

As an hermeneutical attempt in itself, this research compared the methods of Allameh Tabatabaei and Gadamer with the aim of locating how each dealt with text in the light of the philosophical and methodological foundation discussed and presented. As the research demonstrates Gadamer emphasises the role of pre-understanding in interpreting the text and believes that there is no understanding without pre-judgement. Basically, presuppositions are an integral part of the interpreter and there is no way of detaching oneself from them. In this regard, Allameh Tabatabaei has almost the same opinion, meaning that no reader confronts a text with a blank mind. Rather, every interpreter possesses a number of expectations, prejudgements, pre-understandings and personal interests. Fundamentally, the interpreter encounters a text with previously acquired knowledge and information. Part of this knowledge not only does not undermine the understanding of the text, but

also reinforces it. However, the key fact is that the interpreter cannot impose his personal ideas based on his pre-understanding and pre-suppositions on the meaning of the text.

On the basis of Gadamer's opinion it is impossible to reach absolute truth and no one can claim that they have reached full understanding. Islamic scholars also believe that truth has to be re-discovered and reconstructed continually so that its eternal nature is not altered. This approach is realised through the process of proper interpretation which is based on a complete and valid philosophy. Islamic interpreters must take more effective steps in the direction of reaching the truth continuously and should not assume that they have reached the absolute truth. This is only achievable through the correct understanding of the religious sources of knowledge.

In summary, although there are differences in Gadamer's hermeneutical ideas and Tabatabaei's interpretive approaches, it is possible to find some similarities in their discussions. It is proposed by this research that a new independent discipline be established in Islamic sciences under the title "Bases of Understanding and Interpreting the Text". It would then make it possible to answer many questions with regard to interpretive ideas on the basis of the requirements of the day.

In concluding, it should be stated that the German Philosophical Hermeneutics regarding the nature of understanding has proposed a number of ideas that have challenged not only philosophers and epistemologists, but also theologians and literal critics, even experimental scientists. These theories, urge on historians or artists to explore new avenues in the same way that they influence Islamic scholars.

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